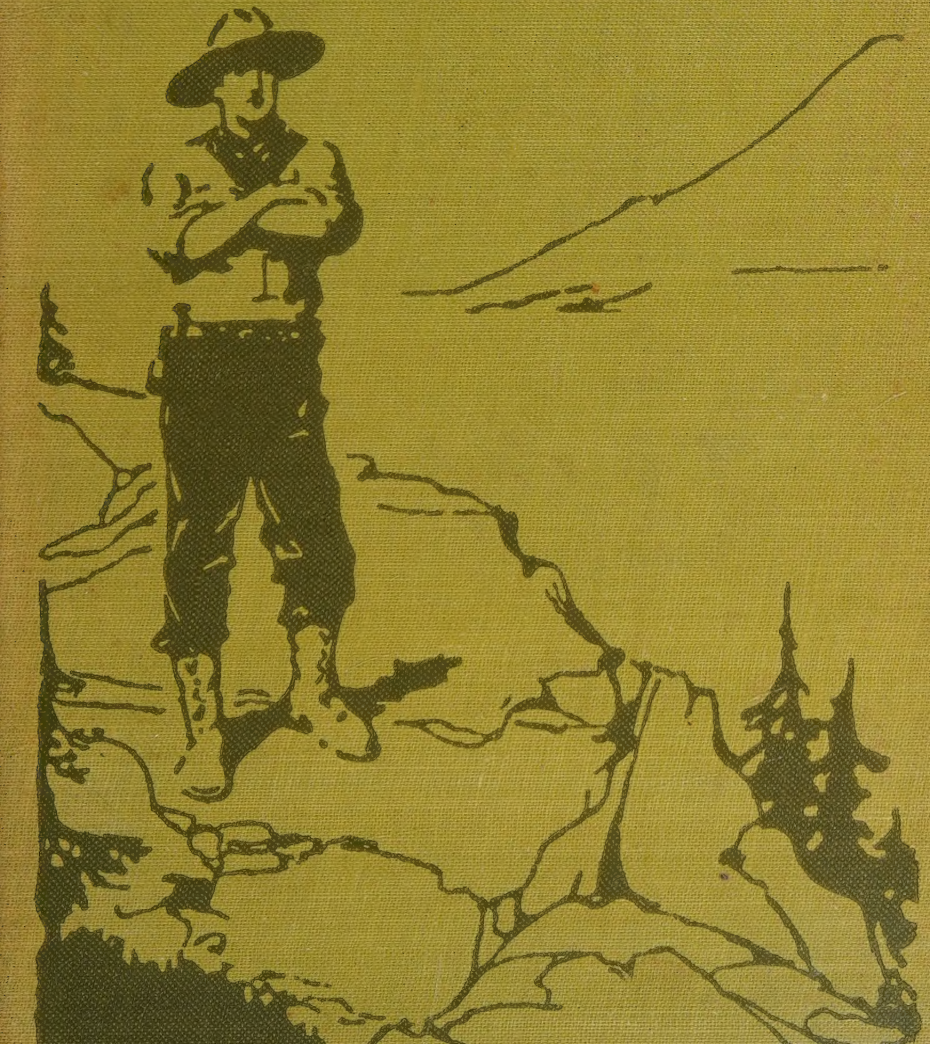
DESERT CONQUEST

A. M. CHISHOLM



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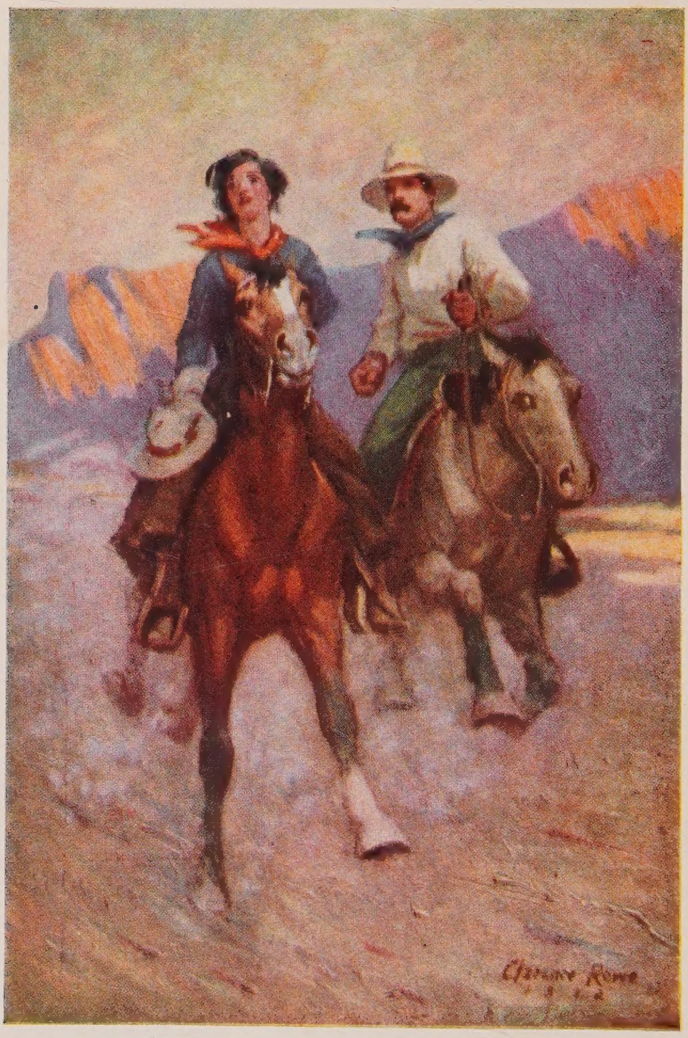

"I'LL MAKE THIS ONE QUIET!" SNAPPED SHEILA, FOR THE HARD PACE HAD TOLD ON HER TEMPER THROUGH HER BRUISES

DESERT CONQUEST

OR

PRECIOUS WATERS

BY

A. M. CHISHOLM

AUTHOR OF

THE BOSS OF WIND RIVER, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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DESERT CONQUEST

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or
PRECIOUS WATERS

CHAPTER I

MISS NITA HESS flattened a snub nose against the Pullman window, and stared at the expressionless face of the plains with an avidity to be explained only by the fact that her acquaintance with them up to then had been principally through the medium of light literature perused surreptitiously in a select school for young ladies in the extreme East. But her remarks from time to time would have shocked the ultra-correct preceptresses of that excellent seat of learning.

"Oh, gee, Clyde," she exclaimed suddenly, "look at the cute little deer! Oh, see 'em scoot!"

Her companion glanced from the window, and stifled a yawn. "Antelope," she commented, without interest. "Yes, I see them, Nita," and leaned back again, closing her eyes.

In fact, Miss Clyde Burnaby was bored by the journey, and a little — a very little — by her fifteen-year-old cousin, daughter of the celebrated James C. Hess, of the equally celebrated Hess Railway System. Nita was a good little girl,

and a nice little girl — in spite of occasional lingual lapses — but only a sense of duty to dear old Uncle Jim had induced Clyde to forego her European trip that she might accompany Nita to the Pacific coast for the benefit of that young lady's health, which Clyde privately considered as sound as the national currency system.

In a democratic moment she had refused Hess' offer of a private car, and she now rather regretted it. She had a headache, and the great coils of red-gold hair seemed to weigh tons. It would have been a relief to have it taken down and brushed by a deft-fingered maid. But the maid also had been left behind. And that, she decided, was a mistake, also.

Clyde Burnaby was alone in the world. Her father's modest fortune, under the able management of his executor, Jim Hess, had expanded wonderfully. So far as money was concerned, no reasonable wish of hers need remain ungratified. She was accomplished, travelled, and very good-looking. She had refused half a dozen offers of hands, hearts, and fortunes — the latter equal to her own — and also two titles unaccompanied by fortunes, with hearts as doubtful collateral. She kept her own bachelor establishment in Chicago, gave to charity with discretion, took a quiet part in the social life of her set, dabbled in art and literature, had a few good friends, and was generally

considered a very lucky, amiable, and handsome young woman.

But just then she was bored with the trip and with Nita, whose enthusiasms she could not share. The heat of the Pullman seemed stifling, the odour of coal unbearable. The land was dead-brown, flat, dreary, monotonous. Leaning back with closed eyes, she longed for the deck of a liner, the strong, salt breezes, the steady pulse of the engines — even for cold rain from a gray sky, sullen, shouldering seas, and the whip of spindrift on her cheeks. Beside her Nita prattled steadily.

"We're going to stop, Clyde. Here's a station. Look at the yard with all the cows in it. I wonder if those men are cowboys. They don't look like the pictures. But isn't it funny how those ponies stand with the reins hanging down and not tied at all? I wish *my* pony would stand that way. Here come two men on horseback. My, but they're riding fast! I wonder if they are trying to catch the train?"

Two blown ponies bore down on the station at a dead run. One of the riders jumped off and ran for the office. The other unstrapped a bundle, apparently mostly slicker, from his companion's saddle cantle. In a moment the first emerged. The energetic Nita had opened the window, and Clyde overheard their conversation.

"I'm shy my grip," said the first. "The agent

doesn't know where she is, and I can't wait. Round up Rosebud soon as you can, and find out what's become of it."

The other swore frankly at Rosebud, who appeared to be an individual. "I'll bet he's drunk, somewheres. I'll express your war bag when I find it."

The engine bell clanged a warning, and the conductor shouted cryptically. The two men shook hands

"So long, Joe," said the younger. "I've had a whale of a time. Come up to my country and see me next year. Come any old time. We'll bust things wide open for you."

The other grinned widely. "The missus ain't lettin' me range like I used to. So long. Keep sober, old-timer. Don't play none with strangers. Say, d'you remember the time when we ——"

Clyde lost the remainder in the shudder and grind of the trucks as the coaches began to move. The two men disappeared from her field of vision. Nita closed the window. Once more she leaned back, resigning herself to the weariness of the journey.

But a moment afterward the man of the platform appeared at the end of the aisle, accompanied by the porter who carried his bundle. Instantly he became the cynosure of a battery of disapproving eyes.

For his apparel would have been more in place

in the bare colonist cars of the first section than in the vestibuled, luxurious rear coaches of the second. From the battered and stained old pony hat on his head to the disreputable laced boots into which his trousers were shoved, he was covered with the gray dust of the plains. Apart from his costume and the top dressing of dust, he was tall, cleanly built, and evidently as hard as a wire nail. His hair missed red by the merest fraction, and his eyes were a clear blue, level and direct. He moved as lightly as a prowling animal, and he met the supercilious and disdainful glances of his fellow passengers with a half smile of amused comprehension.

The porter, with a deference betokening an unusually large advance tip, ushered him to a seat across the aisle from Clyde's. But the stranger, catching a glimpse of himself in the panel mirror, stopped suddenly. Instantly Clyde's nostrils were assailed by a strong odour of leather and horseflesh. She shuddered in spite of herself. It was the last straw. As a rule she was not overparticular, but just then she was in that state of nerves when little things fretted her. She said to herself that a cattle car was the proper place for this young man. As he spoke to the porter she listened resentfully, prepared to disapprove of anything he might say. Said he:

"Mistuh Washin'ton Jeffe'son Bones, look at

me carefully. Do you see any dust upon my garments?"

"Yassuh, yassuh," chuckled the porter. "Don't see much else, suh."

"And could you — on a bet of about a dollar — undertake to put me in a condition not to damage the seats?"

"Yassuh; sho' could, suh!"

"Go to it, then," said the stranger. "I'm after you."

He did not return for an hour. Then he was noticeably cleaner, and the odour of horse was replaced by that of cigars, less objectionable to Clyde. As he took his seat he glanced at her frankly, a shade of drollery in his eye, as if he were quite aware of her disapproval, and was amused by it. She stiffened a trifle, ignoring him utterly. Not by a hair's breadth would she encourage this free-and-easy person.

For some hours she had been annoyed by the behaviour of a man several seats away. Whenever she had glanced in his direction he had been looking at her. Once he had smiled ingratiatingly. Clyde's life had not included first-hand experiences of this kind, but she was able to classify the man accurately. Still, there had been nothing definite to complain of. Now this individual arose and came down the aisle. In his hand was a book. He halted by her side.

"Beg pardon," said he. "Would you care to look at this?"

"No, thank you," she replied frigidly.

"It isn't bad," he persisted. "I'll leave it with you."

"Thank you, I don't want it," said Clyde. But nevertheless he dropped the volume in her lap, smiling offensively.

"Look it over," said he. "I'll get it later."

Paying no attention to her indignant refusal, he walked down the aisle to the smoking compartment. Clyde, a bright spot of anger on either cheek, turned to Nita.

"I think I shall speak to the conductor."

"It's because you're so pretty," said Nita, with an air of vast experience. "I've had the same thing, almost, happen to me. Back at college — in the town, I mean — there was a boy —— But perhaps I'd better not say anything about it. He was very bold indeed!" She pursed her lips primly, but her eyes belied their expression.

"I beg your pardon," said the man across the aisle.

Once more Clyde froze indignantly. Never before had she felt the need of an escort in her travels. Never again, she told herself, would she travel alone with merely a fifteen-year-old kid for her sole companion. She honoured the new offender with a haughty stare. He smiled unaffectedly.

"Nothing like that," he disclaimed, as if he had read her thoughts. "I'll take that book if you don't want it. He can get it back from me."

He stretched a long arm across, and thanked her as she handed him the book mechanically. Forthwith he opened it, and began to read. And he was still absorbed in it when the donor returned.

That gentleman paused uncertainly beside Clyde, who was haughtily unconscious of his presence.

"Did you — er ——" he began.

At that moment the man across the aisle twitched his coat sleeve. "Looking for the book you left with me?" he asked casually. "Here it is."

The other stared at him in uneasy surprise. "I didn't ——"

"Oh, yes, you did," the man across the aisle interrupted. "Anyway, you meant to. You'll remember if you think a minute. You didn't leave it with that young lady, because you don't know her, and you're not the kind of man to butt in where you're not wanted. Now, are you?"

"Of course not," the other replied, with a show of indignation. "I don't know ——"

"Then that's all right," said the stranger quietly. "Here's your book. And there's your seat. And don't make any more mistakes."

The gregarious gentleman accepted this advice and his book meekly. Thereafter he avoided even looking in Clyde's direction. To her relief the

stranger did not presume on the service he had rendered. He stretched his long legs upon the opposite seat, leaned back, and gazed silently at the roof. The afternoon dragged on. Clyde and Nita went to the diner and returned. Afterward the stranger presumably did likewise, spending a decent interval in the smoker. Darkness fell, and the Limited thundered on westward across the plains to the country of the foothills, the mountain ranges, and its goal at the thither end of the Pacific slope.

Suddenly, with a scream of air and a grinding of brake shoes, the train came to a stop. Clyde looked out. The level, monotonous plains were no longer there. The country was rolling, studded with clumps of cottonwoods. The moon, close to the full, touched the higher spots with silver, intensifying the blackness of the shadows.

Clyde peered ahead to the limit of her restricted area of vision, for the lights of a station or a town. There was none. Not even the lighted square of a ranch-house window broke the night. Five minutes passed, ten, and still the train remained motionless. Suddenly, at the forward end of the coach, appeared the porter. Followed the occupants of the smoking compartment, each with his hands on the shoulders of the man in front of him in impromptu lockstep. Behind them came an apparition which caused the passengers, after a first gasp of incredulity,

to vent their feelings in masculine oaths and little feminine screams of alarm.

This intruder was a large man, powerfully built. His hat was shoved back from his forehead, but his face was concealed by a square of dark cloth, cut with eyeholes. In his right hand he dandled with easy familiarity an exceedingly long-barrelled revolver. His left hand rested upon the twin of it, in a holster at his thigh. At his shoulder was another man, similarly masked.

"Everybody sit quiet!" the first commanded crisply. "Gents will hook their fingers on top of their heads, and keep them there. No call to be frightened, ladies, 'long's the men show sense. My partner will pass along the contribution bag. No holding out, and no talk. And just remember I'll get the first man that makes a move."

Clyde had joined in the gasp of surprise, but she had not screamed. Nita was trembling with excitement.

"I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!" the girl whispered. "Oh, Clyde, isn't he a duck of a holdup? Will there be shooting? Haven't any of these men got any nerve?"

Clyde became aware that the man in the seat opposite was speaking to her out of the corner of his mouth, his hands prudently crossed on his pate.

"If you have anything of special value — rings,

watch, that sort of stuff — get rid of it. Put it on the floor if you can, and kick it under the seat ahead. Don't cache it in your own seat. Give him what money you have — that's what he wants. Tell the kid next you to do the same. And don't be nervous. You're as safe as if you were at home."

Clyde wore no rings. The few articles of jewellery she had brought with her were already safely concealed beyond the masculine ken of any mere train robber. But her watch was suspended around her neck by a thin gold chain. The watch could be detached, but the chain itself must be lifted over the head; and that would attract attention. To leave the chain would be to admit the existence of the watch. Without an instant's hesitation she tugged sharply. The frail links broke. Lowering the watch to the floor of the car, she shoved it forward with her foot.

Meanwhile the second masked man was making swift progress down the aisle. In his left hand was a gunny sack, in his right a formidable six-shooter. He was a gentleman of humorous turn, and he indulged in jocose remarks as he went, which, however, fell on an unappreciative audience. Because time pressed he did not attempt to skin each victim clean. He took what he could get, and passed on to the next; but he took everything in sight, and, moreover, each man was forced to turn his pockets inside out. This brought to light several

pocket-edition firearms, which likewise went into the bag. With infinite humour he declared his intention of taking them home to his children. They were toys, he explained, with which the darlings could not hurt themselves.

"Thank you, miss," was his acknowledgment of the roll of bills which Clyde handed him. "You're sure an example to a lot o' these tinhorn sports. I reckon you got some pretty stones cached somewheres too, but I won't force your hand, seein's you've acted like a little lady. Just get up till I look at the seat. Now, partner" — he turned on the man across the aisle — "it's you to sweeten!"

That individual produced a very attenuated roll. "Sorry I can't go to the centre any stronger, old-timer. You've got me at the wrong end between pay days."

"Huh!" The holdup eyed him suspiciously. "Keep your hands stric'ly away from your pockets for a minute." He slapped them in quick succession. "No gun," said he, "and that's lucky for both of us, maybe. Business is business, partner, but I hate to set an old-timer afoot complete. Keep out about ten for smokes and grub."

"Yours truly," responded the other. "When you land in the calaboose for this racket I'll keep you in tobacco. What name shall I ask for?"

"If I land there you can ask for a damfool — and I'll answer the first time," laughed the holdup over

his shoulder. "Next gent! Here's the little bag. Lady, keep your weddin' ring. You fat sport, stand up till I see what you're sittin' on. Why, was you tryin' to hatch out that bunch of money? I'll surely do that incubatin' myself."

He levied tribute swiftly, in spite of his badinage, and the gunny sack sagged heavier and heavier. As he reached the end, his companion, who had dominated the passengers with his gun, abandoned his position and came down the aisle. At the rear door he turned.

"Keep your seats till the train moves," he ordered harshly. "I'm layin' for the first man that sticks his head out of this car."

Behind him the coach buzzed like a disturbed hive. Its occupants bewailed their losses, vowed vengeance on both holdups and railway. Women reproached men with cowardice. Men told each other what they would have done if —— But not one attempted to leave his seat.

Nita turned to Clyde with sparkling eyes. "And now I've been in a holdup!" she exclaimed. "Won't that be a thing to tell the girls? Were you frightened, Clyde? *I* wasn't."

"I don't think so," Clyde replied. "I'm glad we saved our watches." The words recalled the man across the aisle. He was leaning back, listening to odd bits of conversation, a smile of amusement on his face. Clyde leaned across.

"I want to thank you," she said. "We should never have thought of hiding our watches."

He nodded pleasantly. "No, not likely. I hope you didn't lose much money. He left me ten dollars. I don't want to be misunderstood, but that's very much at your service until you can get more."

"And what shall you do — till pay day?" she asked, obeying a sudden mischievous impulse.

"Oh, I'll worry along," he replied. His long arm stretched across, and a ten-dollar bill fell in her lap.

"No, no," she said, "I was joking. I have plenty ——"

She stopped suddenly. Somewhere toward the head of the train a revolver barked, and barked again. Then came a staccato fusillade.

Swiftly the man across the aisle reached for his bundle, tore it open, and plucked from it a long-barrelled, flat-handled, venomous automatic pistol and a box of cartridges. He slid out the clip, snapped it back, and went down the car in long pantherlike bounds, bending half double.

Up forward the shooting, which had ceased, began again. Suddenly there broke into it the voice of another weapon, rapid and sustained as the roll of an alarm clock. Other guns chimed in. A miniature battle seemed to be in progress. And then it died. An occasional shot came from the distance. Silence ensued.

Men whose curiosity got the better of prudence

left the car and returned. The train robbers were gone. It was thought that two or three were wounded. It was the express messenger who had started the shooting. He had got loose, somehow, in his rifled car, got a gun from a drawer, and opened fire. He was shot through the shoulder. A brave fellow, that. The company should do something for him. Two others of the train crew were hit.

Clyde awaited the return of the man across the aisle. The train began to move, gathered way, and thundered on. Still he did not return. The porter began to make up the berths. To him she applied for information. He knew nothing. The conductor was in equal ignorance. Inquiries throughout the train were fruitless. The man of the seat across the aisle was not forthcoming. His few belongings, which threw no light on his identity, were gathered up to await his appearance. It was suggested, to Clyde's indignation, that he was an accomplice of the robbers, but in what manner was not clear.

And so Clyde Burnaby went on to the coast with ten dollars which she did not in the least need. She neither saw nor heard more of their owner; but, though it was unlikely she should meet him again, she kept the identical bill. On her return she tucked it away in a drawer in her writing desk; and when occasionally she noticed it there it was merely to wonder, with some self-reproach, how its owner had fared until the next pay day.

CHAPTER II

IN A secluded corner of a certain club billiard room two middle-aged gentlemen padded around and around a table, and poked at balls. Both appeared bored by the amusement. Their skill was little, and their luck was rather less, so that a ball rarely found a pocket. Between strokes they carried on a conversation having to do with such light and frivolous topics as bond issues, guarantees thereof, sinking funds, haulage rates, and legal decisions and pending legislation affecting transportation. Or it might be more accurate to say that one endeavoured to engage the other in conversation on these esoteric matters, at which the other repeatedly shied, evincing a preference for those of more general human interest.

Not that he was uninformed on these topics. Quite the reverse. He was a rotund, florid little man, with twinkling, humorous eyes, which could bore like augers on occasion, and a mouth as firm and close as a steel trap. His name was William Bates Rapp, and his specialty was corporation law. He was counsel for the Western Airline Railway,

and just then he was pretending to play billiards with its president, Cromwell York.

York, who also was pretending to play billiards with Rapp, was a dogged gentleman who was accustomed to take his pound of flesh whenever he could not obtain, on some pretext, two pounds, His subordinates said that he worked twenty-five hours a day, which gives, if you consider it, an advantage of some fifteen days per annum. He was in the grip of his business, body and soul. It fascinated him, dominated him more and more as the years went on, as his own fortune and his interests increased. He was continually reaching out for more territory, and in so doing he came in hostile contact with other railway men, also gunning for the same game. Occasionally, therefore, they gunned for each other. When York was hit he took his medicine; when he hit the other fellow he chose as vital a spot as he could. Even as he played billiards his mind was elsewhere, which accounted in part for his poor success at the game.

"Speaking about Prairie Southern," said he, "we have about decided to take it over."

Rapp sighed. "I'm not a perpetual-motion legal machine, York, Won't that keep till to-morrow?"

"We pay you a big enough retainer," said York, with the frankness of years of intimacy. "What do you suppose we do it for?"

"Principally, I imagine, to keep you out of jail,"

Rapp retorted, with equal frankness. "I've done it so far, but ——" He shook his head forebodingly. "Well, if you *will* talk, come and sit down. I'm tired of this. Now, then, about Prairie Southern: have they come to the end of their rope, or did you pull it in a little for them?"

"I didn't need to," said York. "They have tied themselves up in hard knots. We don't particularly want the road; but, as matters stand, we can buy it cheaply. Later we might want it, and it would undoubtedly cost more. Besides, I don't want Hess to get hold of it as a feeder to his lines."

"Jim Hess is a sort of bugbear to you," said Rapp. "You'll keep prodding him till he horns you one of these days."

"Two can play at that," York replied grimly.

"There's mighty little play about Jim Hess when he goes on the warpath," Rapp commented. "Well, let's get the worst over. There's short of three hundred miles of this Prairie Southern, as I understand it. It runs somewhere near the foothills. The country doesn't grow anything yet. The only reason for its building was a coal-mine boom that petered out. Its bonding privilege was one of the most disgraceful bits of jobbery ever lobbied through a corrupt little legislature. It was a political scandal from its birth. It is burdened with a multitude of equities. It never has paid, and likely

it never will pay. You know these things as well as I do. I'm hanged if I see why you want it."

"If we don't get it some one else will," said York. "I wish you'd look into their affairs, and see what sort of a legal bill of health they have. I am putting our accountants on their finances."

"All right," said Rapp. "I'll give 'em a bill of health like a pest-house record. Their bonded indebtedness is shocking, and they have all sorts of litigation pending against them."

"I'll tell you one thing," York said. "They have a large land grant."

"Which they got because the land was worthless."

"Supposed to be worthless," York amended.

Rapp cocked his head like a terrier that suddenly discerns a large and promising rat hole. "Come through," he said.

"This land," York explained, "is in the dry belt. It was supposed to be worth nothing when the P. S. charter was granted, and so the government of that day was generous with it. As a matter of fact, the land is good when irrigated; and it can be irrigated — or most of it can."

"How do you know it's any good?"

"There are some first-class ranches down there."

"If that is so, why don't P. S. put the lands on the market? They need the money."

"No advertising or selling machinery, and not enough money to put in an irrigation system, and no credit. They can't afford to wait."

Rapp considered. "Plenty of water for these lands?"

"That's a question," York admitted. "The main water down that way is a river called the Coldstream. The ranchers have their water records, which of course take precedence of any we might file. There may be enough — I don't know. That will have to be ascertained. But if this stuff can be irrigated it can be sold. Our land department will look after that."

"Almost any sort of an irrigated gold brick can be sold nowadays," said Rapp cynically. "I admit that you have some pretty fair con men in your land department."

"We never put anything on the market that wasn't a perfectly legitimate proposition," said York, with dignity.

"Depends on what you call 'legitimate,'" said Rapp. "I've read some of your land advertising. If you sold shares by means of a prospectus no more truthful, you'd do time for it. You know blame well you unload your stuff on people who depend on selected photographs and pretty pen pictures of annual yields per acre. Of course, any man who buys land without seeing it deserves exactly the sort of land he gets. I'm not criticising

at all — merely pointing out that I know the rudiments of the game."

"Help us play it, then," said York. "Dig into Prairie Southern, and see what we get for our money."

William Bates Rapp did so. By various complicated and technical documents he grafted the moribund Prairie Southern upon the vigorous trunk of Western Airline, after which he washed his hands of the operation by a carefully worded letter accompanying a huge bill of costs, and dismissed the matter from his mind; for it was only one transaction among a score of more important ones.

Later, the experts of the Airline descended on the carcass of poor old Prairie Southern, to see what had best be done with the meat upon its bones, and the result was fairly satisfactory. The traffic was inconsiderable, but showed signs of improvement. The land hunger was upon the people, frightened by the cry that cheap lands were almost at an end. Many were stampeded into buying worthless acres which they did not want, in the fear that if they delayed there would be nothing left to buy. Fake real-estate schemes — colonies, ten-acre orchard tracts, hen farms, orange groves, prune plantations — flourished over the width and length of a continent, and promoters reaped a harvest. Land with a legitimate basis of value doubled and trebled in price between seasons.

It was a period of inflation, of claim without proof,

of discounting the future. Men raw from the city bought barren acres on which practical farmers had starved, in the expectation of making an easy, healthful living. And in this madness the lands of the old Prairie Southern grant, at one time supposed to be worthless, justified the foresight of Cromwell York by reaching a value in excess of even his expectations. For, given water, they were very good lands indeed, and Western Airline was prepared to sell them with a water guarantee.

This took time; and it was two years after the acquisition of Prairie Southern that York, a trifle grayer and a shade more dictatorial than before, was one morning handed a card by his secretary. He frowned at it, for the name was strange.

"Who's this Casey Dunne, and what does he want?"

Dunne, it appeared, wished to see him in connection with the Coldstream irrigation project, then well under way. He owned property in that vicinity; he also represented certain other ranchers.

"Lawyer?" snapped York. The secretary thought not. "Show him in."

When Dunne entered York did not immediately look up from his papers. This was for general effect. When he did look, he became conscious that even as he was measuring so was he being measured.

Casey Dunne carried an atmosphere of outdoors.

From the deep tan of his neck, against which the white of his collar lay in startling contrast, to the slender, sinewy brown hands, he bore token of wind and sun and activity in the open. His clothes were new, excellent in fit and material; but, though he did not wear them awkwardly, one gathered the impression that he was accustomed to easier, more informal garments. His manner was entirely self-confident, and betrayed neither awe nor embarrassment. Which gave York an unfavourable impression to start with.

"Take a chair, Mr. Dunne," he said. "I can give you five minutes or ten. Not more. What can I do for you?"

"I may have to ask you to stretch that time limit a little," said Dunne, smiling as if York were an old friend. "Let me start at the beginning, and then I won't have to go back. I live down on the Coldstream, on the line of the old Prairie Southern, which you acquired a couple of years ago. With it you got their land grant. Your land department, after looking the Coldstream blocks over, decided to irrigate and sell these lands; and they undertook a main ditch and a system of ditches, and they are selling the lands at the present time."

"I know all this," said York impatiently. "Carrol runs our land department, and he deals with these matters. He's the man you want to see."

"He referred me to you," said Dunne. "I know

this is ancient history, but I'm cleaning up as I go along. You will get your water for these lands from the Coldstream. I and others own property there, and we get our water from the river below your intake. Are you aware that your ditch system is capable of carrying, and that the lands you are selling with a guarantee of an adequate water supply will require, *almost the entire normal flow of the Coldstream?*"

"I have understood from our land department" — York chose his words carefully — "that the river contains ample water to irrigate our lands."

"Which, I need scarcely point out, is not an answer to my question," Dunne commented quietly.

"But which," York countered, "is all that I am concerned with, Mr. Dunne."

The railway man and the younger, bronzed out-of-doors man eyed each other in silence while one might count ten. In the last words the railway's policy had been laid down, an issue defined, a challenge given.

Casey Dunne's eyes narrowed a little, and his mouth tightened. He spoke very quietly, but it was the exercised quiet of self-restraint:

"I had hoped that you would not take that ground, Mr. York. Let me show you how this concerns myself and others. Take my own case: I have a ranch down there; I have my water record. I have gone on working the ranch, making improve-

ments from year to year, and every dollar I could scrape up I put into more land. I wasn't speculating. I can gamble with any man when I have to; but this wasn't gambling. There was the land, and there was the water. The increase of value was merely a question of time. Others bought as I bought. We put our money and our years of work into lands along the Coldstream. Our whole stake is there. I want you to appreciate that — to get our viewpoint — because with us this isn't a question of greater or less profit, but a question of existence itself. If you take away our water our lands are worthless, and we go broke. I can't put it any plainer than that."

"And without water," said York, "the railway's lands are worthless — or so I am told. The unfortunate feature, according to what you say, seems to be that there is not water enough for you and for us. Therefore each must stand upon his legal rights."

"You raise the point," said Dunne. "It is a question of legal and moral right against what I think — and I don't want to be offensive — but what I think is an attempt to read into a clause of an old charter a meaning which it was never intended to carry."

York's eyebrows drew down. "The clause in the Prairie Southern's charter to which I presume you refer is perfectly clear. It states that the

railway company may take from the Coldstream or any other running stream 'sufficient water for its own purposes.' Those are the exact words of the charter. It saves existing rights, but there were none then existing. Therefore the railway's right is first, and all water records are subject to it. The charter further empowers the company to improve, buy, sell, and deal in land. These, then, are purposes of the company, according to its charter, and for these purposes it may construct and maintain all necessary works. Could anything be clearer? We acquired every right that Prairie Southern possessed. The rights were in existence when you bought your land. Therefore I do not think you should complain when we exercise them, even though they may affect you to some extent."

"I follow your argument," Dunne observed, "but the words 'sufficient water for its own purposes' were never intended to mean that the railway should take the whole river."

"What do you think they meant?"

"What any sensible man would think. You may take sufficient water to run your trains, to fill your tanks, to use in any way in connection with your business of transportation, and nobody will object to that; but when you undertake to divert a whole river to irrigate lands in order to sell them, you go too far. That is the business of a real-estate company, and not of a railway company."

Cromwell York, who had obtained the unanimous opinions of three eminent corporation counsel upon that very point, smiled tolerantly.

"You are not a lawyer, Mr. Dunne?"

"No."

"Nor am I. But I have had this clause passed upon, and I tell you that we are quite within our rights. The charter covers the case completely, according to the best legal opinion."

"But nobody thought of irrigation when this charter was granted," objected Dunne. "The land was supposed to be worthless. That was why Prairie Southern got such a large land grant. You know that."

"That has nothing to do with the case. Let us stick to the point. What, so far, have you to complain of?"

"This," said Dunne shortly. "You have a charter which you say entitles you to all the water in the river. You are constructing ditches sufficient to carry it all; you are constructing a dam to divert it all; and you are selling land to an acreage which, if cultivated, will require it all. You admit your intentions. When that dam is built and those ditches are filled our ranches must go dry. It spells our ruin. We are living on sufferance. And yet you ask us what we have to complain of!"

"I need scarcely assure you," said York, "that

unless and until we require the water it will not be taken."

"Not nearly good enough," Dunne returned. "We can't work and improve our ranches with that hanging over us. Such an assurance is of no practical value."

"It is all I can give you."

Casey Dunne nodded as one who sees things turning out as he expected. "Then naturally we shall be forced to fight you."

"As you like," said York indifferently. "You will lose, that's all. I can't do any more for you. It is my duty to my shareholders to increase the value of those lands if I can do so legally."

"I wish I could get your viewpoint," said Casey Dunne, and for the first time his voice lost a shade of its calm and began to vibrate with anger. "I'd like to know just how much it differs from a claim jumper's or a burglar's. You know as well as I do that you have no earthly right to take that water. You know you are taking advantage of the careless wording of an old charter. You know that it means the utter ruin of men who went into a God-forsaken land without a dollar, and took a brown, parched wilderness by the throat, and fought it to a standstill — men who backed their faith in the country with years of toil and privation, who made the trails and dug the ditches, and proved the land. And you have the colossal nerve to set

a little additional dividend on watered stock against the homes of those men — old, some of them, now — and the rights of their wives and children to the fruits of their work!"

The railway man surveyed him with quiet amusement. To him this resembled the vicarious indignation of a very young country lawyer at a client's wrongs.

"Are you," he asked, with quiet sarcasm, "one of those who made the trails and dug the ditches and endured the privations? If so, they seem to have agreed with you."

Casey Dunne's blue eyes narrowed, and his voice fell to a level. He leaned forward across the desk with an ugly set to his jaw.

"If you want to know just how strong I'm in on this I'll tell you," he snapped. "I'm thirty-four years old. I've made my own living since I was fifteen. I've roughed it because I had to, and I've gone low enough at times. I've starved and blistered and frozen in places you never heard of; and out of it all I got together a little stake. I put that into Coldstream land. Do you think I'm going to let you take it without a fight? I'm *not*."

York, who never let go himself, drummed on his desk thoughtfully. This was a sentiment he understood and appreciated. A fighter, he recognized a kindred spirit. Also if this man were influential,

as appeared likely, among the Coldstream ranchers, it might be well to make terms with him.

"You haven't a chance," he said. "I'll be quite frank with you. We have the best legal advice, and our position is quite unassailable. Even if it were not, we could appeal you into bankruptcy. Still, though I don't admit that you have the least claim on us, we might possibly buy in your holdings at a fair present price."

"That's freeze-out," Dunne returned bluntly. "You force us to sell, and afterward you include our lands in your ditch system, and clean up a thousand per cent. It won't do. We proved that country, and we want that profit ourselves."

"I'm making the offer to you alone," said York. "I don't care about the others. We don't want their land."

"Then why are you trying to make a deal with me?" rasped Casey Dunne. "You think I'll go home and tell my neighbours that they have no show at all to buck the railway, and the best thing we all can do is to sell out for what we can get — and then I keep my mouth shut on the fact that I'm getting more than the rest of them."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped York, who did not like to hear his thought done into plain English. "My offer was made in good faith, but I withdraw it. Keep your land."

"And the devil do me good with it, I suppose!"

said Casey Dunne, picking up his hat and rising. "Very well, Mr. York. I know now where you stand. And here's where we stand: Not one of us will sell an acre or a foot. We are going to keep our land, and we are going to keep our water — somehow."

"The best advice I can give you is to see a good lawyer," said York.

"I'll take the advice," Dunne replied. "But whether we take the lawyer's advice or not is another matter entirely."

"What do you mean by that?" York demanded.

"I mean," said Dunne, who had quite recovered his usual manner, which contained a spice of mockery that York found irritating, "that we're not very strong on law down where I come from. Some of us have got along pretty well with what law we carried around with us. Good morning, Mr. York."

CHAPTER III

CONSIDERABLY more than a year after her experience with the train robbers, Clyde Burnaby received a dinner invitation from the Wades. Kitty Wade was an old friend; her husband, Harrison Wade, was a lawyer just coming into prominence. They had an unpretentious home on the North Side, and such entertaining as they did was on a modest scale. Nevertheless, one met there people worth while, coming people, most of them, seldom those who had "arrived" in the French signification of the word — young professional and business men, authors, playwrights, and politicians in embryo — comparatively unknown as yet, but who, in a few months or a few years, might be famous.

"Oh, Clyde," said Kitty Wade, as Clyde, having removed her wraps, was arranging her hair before the mirror, "I had planned to have Van Cromer take you in to dinner, but at the last moment he couldn't come, and Stella Blake couldn't come either. I had a Mr. Casey Dunne for her. And so, if you don't mind ——"

"Of course not," said Clyde. "But post me a

little, Kitty. What has Mr. Casey Dunne done, or what is he going to do? What does one talk about to him?"

"Crops," replied Mrs. Wade.

Clyde sighed resignedly. "My dear, I don't mind for once, but I never could understand the market. May wheat, September options, war and rumours of wars, and the effect on prices of the weather sent by divine Providence, probabilities of a large or short crop — these be sealed mysteries to me."

"But Mr. Dunne isn't a broker," said Mrs. Wade. "He's a farmer."

"A — a *farmer!*" Clyde repeated, in much the same tone she would have used if her hostess had informed her that she was to be paired with a Zulu.

Mrs. Wade laughed. "Not the 'Old Homestead' kind, dear. It's the fault of my Eastern bringing up. I should have said a 'rancher.' He comes from somewhere near the Rockies, and I believe he grows wheat and hay and cattle and — oh, whatever else ranchers grow."

"Oh!" said Clyde doubtfully. "And is he excessively Western? Does he exude the 'God's-own-country' and 'land-of-opportunity' line of conversation? Will he try to sell me land? And how old is he?"

"I have never seen him," Mrs. Wade replied. "He did Harrison a good turn once — gave him

some information about lands or something. Harry assures me that he doesn't wear big revolvers or spurs, or eat with his knife — in fact, he is quite presentable. But if you like I'll give you some one else."

"Oh, no," said Clyde. "Mr. Dunne will do very well. I think I shall prefer him to a broker."

"So good of you, dear," smiled Kitty Wade. "Shall we go down? I think the others will be arriving."

Clyde endeavoured to construct an advance portrait of Casey Dunne, but without much success. Unconsciously she was influenced by the characters of alleged Western drama, as flamboyant and nearly as accurate as the Southerners of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." She was genuinely surprised when she found him to be a rather good-looking young man in irreproachable evening clothes.

At that moment dinner was announced. He offered his arm without hesitation. Clyde intercepted a glance from her hostess, brimming with laughter. She laughed back with relief. She had rather dreaded the experience of a dinner companion who would be guilty of all manner of solecisms. Clearly her fears had been groundless. Save in the matter of tan, which was rather becoming, Wade's Western friend differed in no outward detail from the other men in the room.

When they were seated came the embarrassing

moment — when it became necessary to find a conversational topic of common acquaintance. But this passed easily. From the table decorations Clyde turned deftly to flowers in general, to trees, to outdoor things. Casey Dunne laughed gently.

"You are trying to talk of things I am expected to know about, aren't you, Miss Burnaby?"

She evaded the charge, laughing also. "What *shall* we talk about, Mr. Dunne? You shall choose for both of us."

"No, I won't do that. Talk of whatever interests you. I'll follow your lead if I can."

She took him at his word, finding that his acquaintance with current literature and topics of the day was rather more intimate than her own. He seemed to have ideas and opinions formed by his own thought, not mere repetitions of reviews or newspaper comment.

As she glanced at his profile from time to time she became aware of an odd familiarity. He resembled some one she had seen before, but the identity eluded her. Their conversation gradually took a more personal form. Dunne told a story, and told it well. He spoke casually of the West, but instituted no comparisons.

"You are really an exception," Clyde told him. "The average Westerner is such a superior mortal. He looks down on the East, and when he comes among Easterners he condescends."

"It's a relief to have some one admit that Chicago is in the East," he laughed. "No, I don't brag about the West. It's a good country, and it will be better when we have approximated more to Eastern conditions. We are undeveloped as yet. In twenty years ——"

"Ah, there it is!" she interrupted. "Scratch a Russian, and find a Tartar. And I took you for an exception!"

He laughed. "I plead guilty. The microbe is in the air. We all have it. Can you blame us? Do you know the West?"

"Only what I have seen from the train. I have told you of every one here. In return tell me about yourself. Mrs. Wade says that you are a rancher."

"Yes, I have a good little ranch in the dry belt, within sight of the mountains."

"The dry belt?" she queried.

"Yes. We call that part of the country which has little or no rain the 'dry belt.' Formerly, for that reason, it was supposed to be useless. But since irrigation has been discovered — you see, it's really a recent discovery with us in America, whatever it is with other peoples — we dry-belt ranchers are in a better position than any others. For we are able to give the land moisture whenever it needs it. Whereas others have to depend on the uncertainties of rainfall. About once in five years their crops are

ruined by drought. But we are able to water our fields as the city man waters his lawn."

"So that you are certain of a good crop every year."

"No, not certain. We have merely eliminated one cause of failure. We are still at the tender mercies of hot winds, hail, and frosts late and early."

These things were but names to her. They called up no concrete visions of the baking, siroccolike winds that curdled the grain in the milk, the hail that threshed it and beat it flat, of the late frosts that nipped the tender green shoots in spring, and the early ones in fall that soured the kernels before the complete ripening. But she saw that to him they typified enemies, real, deadly, ever threatening, impossible, so far, to guard against.

Dimly she began to perceive that while certain forces of nature made always for growth, still others, equally powerful, made for destruction. Between the warring forces stood the Man of the Soil, puny, insignificant, matching his own hardly won and his forefather's harder-won knowledge against the elements; bending some to his advantage, minimizing the effects of others, openly defying those he could neither control nor avoid. And she partly realized his triumph in having vanquished one of these inimical forces, one of his most dreaded enemies, Drought.

"You like the life?"

"Yes, I like it. It's idyllic, compared with some phases of existence that I have experienced."

"You have had varied experiences?"

"'Varied!' Yes, I suppose you may call them that."

"Won't you tell me about them?"

"There isn't much to tell, and that little not very entertaining. You see, Miss Burnaby, if my youthful mouth was ever acquainted with a silver spoon it was snatched away at a tender age."

"I beg your pardon," said Clyde quickly. "I'm afraid my request was impertinent."

"Not at all. I went West when I was a kid, and I've seen quite a bit of country. Then, when I had money enough, I put it into land, and went to ranching. That's all there is to it."

She was quite certain, somehow, that there was a great deal more to it. She fell to studying his hands. The fingers were long and slender, but flat, sinewy, and powerful. They seemed to express tenacity of purpose, a grip of whatever they undertook. Once more she looked at his profile, and again she was struck by an elusive familiarity.

"You remind me of somebody — of something," she said. "I can't place it."

"Indeed!" he responded. "Now, I hope the unplaced recollection is not unpleasant."

"It's not definite enough. But it is there. It's

not so much when you face me — it's the side view. I've never met you before, of course."

"Of course not," he agreed, but his eyes laughed at her.

"Have I?" she exclaimed. "Surely not! I'm not forgetful, as a rule."

"I was wondering," he said, "if you would remember me. I knew you at once, but I can't claim the honour of having been presented before to-night. Our acquaintance, if I may call it that, was very informal."

"But when — where?" she demanded. "I don't recall ——"

"Well, it's not surprising," he admitted. "I was dressed differently. Naturally you wouldn't expect to see me in these." He glanced down at his evening clothes. "The fact is, I sat across the aisle from you in the car when ——"

"Oh!" she cried. "Now I know. When the train was held up. Why, of course it *was* you. I'm so glad to meet you again. I've always wanted to thank you for relieving me of the attentions of that — that ——"

"That fresh guy," he supplied gravely.

"Thank you! That 'fresh guy,'" she smiled. "But for you I should have lost my watch. And then you lent me ten dollars."

"Well, you see, they got all your cash."

"I don't know whatever made me take it. I have

it still. I didn't need it. I had a book of travellers' checks and credits at the coast. I intended to give it back to you at once. I hope it didn't inconvenience ——"

She stopped, conscious that her estimate of the finances of the man in the train had probably been mistaken.

"Not a bit," he replied. "I had a small roll stowed away."

"But what became of you?" she asked. "You didn't come back. I asked the conductor and the porters — everybody. What happened?"

"Why, the explanation is very simple, though I'm not proud of it. When I heard the shooting up in front I thought it was up to me to help the train boys, and I went out with the best intentions. The holdups were backing off, burning a lot of powder but doing no harm, and I guessed that their horses were in a bluff about five hundred yards from the track. Of course, once they got in the saddle they would make a get-away, so far as we were concerned, and I thought if I could beat them to the horses and turn the animals loose we would practically have them rounded up. That's what I tried to do. But as I was running I tripped, and went headfirst into a stump or a stone. Anyway, it knocked me out, and when I emerged from dreamland the train was moving, and I couldn't catch it. So I just tramped the ties to the next station. And there I had a job

explaining that I wasn't a holdup myself. It didn't strike those boneheads that no sane holdup would come walking along the track a few hours after a robbery."

Clyde was disappointed at the baldness of his narration. Almost any man would have made some effort at description. Dunne had made none whatever. He had confined himself to the barest of bare facts.

"You make a poor raconteur, Mr. Dunne."

"Really, that's all there was to it," he replied. "'We fit and they fit; and they ran and we ran' — or at least I did till I tripped."

Mrs. Wade rose.

"After you have had your cigar we will continue our conversation, if you care to," said Clyde.

"Just what I was going to ask. I hope Wade's cigars are small."

When the ladies had gone, Harrison Wade drew his chair beside Dunne's.

"I've been thinking over that matter of yours, Casey, and the more I think it over the less I like it. That charter, backed by Airline money and influence, will be a hard thing to get over. I hate to discourage you, but the best advice I can give to you and your neighbours is to put a fair price on your holdings, and offer them to the railway *en bloc*."

"But we don't want to sell, Wade. Couldn't you

get an injunction or something, and tie up their operations?"

"No, I'm afraid not. You can't bring an action until you have something to found it on — that is to say, some wrong to complain of — some actual interference with your rights to water. And you can't get an injunction unless you can show that your rights are beyond question. It's a toss-up whether that charter takes precedence or not. I'm speaking frankly to you. With an ordinary client I'd throw a professional front of profound knowledge, but as it is I own up that it's a complicated question, depending almost entirely on the court. And courts are just as uncertain as other human institutions."

Casey Dunne frowned through the spreading fog of cigar smoke. "I'm quite aware of it, Wade. But here it is: We don't want to sell. Even if they gave us a fair present price, we would be losers, for land out there is going to double in value in the next couple of years. And what they intend to do is simply to freeze us out and force us to sell at dry-land prices. Therefore, we've *got* to fight. Go ahead and try for an injunction. If that is refused, bring an action as soon as you can. And meanwhile we'll hang on to our water somehow."

"Don't do anything to prejudice your case in the courts," Wade warned.

"According to you York will do that, anyway," said Dunne. "No, Wade, that's flat, final, what-

ever. We won't let go till we have to. We won't be skinned out of the profit we are entitled to by foresight and hard work. Speaking for myself, I've put my whole stack on this bet, and with a straight deal it's a sure winner. And if the deal's going to be crooked I'll break up the game any way that comes handy."

"Go to it, my friend," said the lawyer. "It's your affair. I've told you what I think, and I'll not add to it. I hope you have water when I come out this summer to make you that long-promised visitation." He changed the subject abruptly. "You and Clyde Burnaby seemed to be getting on swimmingly."

"Clyde — is that her name?" said Dunne. "Seems like a nice girl."

"She's all of that. You know who she is, of course?"

"Not a bit. Just her name."

"Niece of old Jim Hess, with a fortune of her own."

"Pretty lucky," Dunne commented.

"Pretty *and* lucky," said his host. "Old York hates Hess like poison, a sentiment which Hess returns, according to rumour. I don't suppose you've told Clyde Burnaby your troubles?"

Dunne stared at him. "Of course not! What do you take me for?"

"That's all right, my son; don't swell up so. Why don't you tell her?"

"Why the deuce should I? Do you think I go yawping my business affairs to every female I meet?"

"Well, Clyde Burnaby's good stuff," said Wade. "She has a level head. If it comes up that way, Casey, tell her all about it. She'll sympathize with you."

"I'm not looking for sympathy."

"And she might give you some good advice."

"Rats!" Casey Dunne commented, inelegantly but forcibly, and Wade said no more.

Dunne was glad when the cigars were ended. He found Clyde Burnaby at the piano, barely touching the keys. A faint melody seemed to flow from her finger's tips.

"Do you sing, Mr. Dunne?"

"Only very confidentially. When I was riding for a cow outfit I used to sing at night, when the cattle were bedded down. Sort of tradition of the business that it kept 'em quiet. They didn't seem to mind my voice. And that's really the most encouragement I ever got."

Mrs. Wade asked Clyde to play. She complied at once, without hesitation. They applauded her. Afterward one of the men sang, to her accompaniment. Then she and Dunne drifted together once more.

"I liked your playing," he said, "but not what you played. It had no tune."

"It was Beethoven!"

"All the same, it had no tune. I like the old songs — the ones I can follow in my mind with the words I know."

"Why, so do I," she admitted; "but, my Philistine friend, I was expected to play the other kind."

"I understand that. But I like to hear what is low grade enough for me to appreciate. I don't get much music at home."

"Tell me about your ranch. I'd like to know what you do and how you live. To begin with, beggin' yer honour's pardon in advance, is there a Mrs. Dunne?"

"No such luck," he replied. He sketched the ranch routine briefly. She was interested, asking many questions. The evening wore away. The guests began to depart. But Clyde had arranged to stay the night with the Wades.

"By the way," she said, "I still have your ten-dollar bill. I will send it to you."

"Don't do that. Keep it."

"I couldn't."

"Of course you can. You may pay me interest if you like."

"At what per cent?"

"Current rates in my country — eight."

"Very well," she laughed. "It's a bargain. But where is your security?"

He considered gravely. "Certainly I should have

something. I will be satisfied with that rose you are wearing."

Clyde coloured slightly, glancing at him swiftly.

"Kitty," she called to Mrs. Wade, "I want you as a witness. Mr. Dunne has made me a loan. His security is this rose — and nothing more. Please witness that I give it to him."

And later that night Kitty Wade said to her lord:

"For a rancher, Harry, your Casey Dunne has class. I never knew Clyde Burnaby to give a flower to any man before."

"And you see a case of love at first sight," said Wade, scornfully and sleepily. "Pshaw, Kitty, you're barking at a knot. Casey's a fine chap, but Lord! she's got too much money for him. Suppose she did give him a rose! Didn't she call you over to chaperon the transaction? That puts the sentimental theory out of business."

"And that's all a lawyer knows!" said his wife. "Why, you old silly, don't you see that she couldn't have given it to him any other way — with all those people in the room? Clyde Burnaby can think about as fast as anybody I know."

CHAPTER IV

CASEY DUNNE pulled a fretful buckskin to a halt as he topped a rise and looked down on Talapus Ranch. It lay before him, the thousand-odd acres of it, lush and green beneath the sloping, afternoon sun, an oasis in a setting of brown, baked earth and short, dry grasses which seldom felt the magic of the rains. The ranch was owned by Donald McCrae, a pioneer of the district, and it was the show place of the country. It was Exhibit A to incomers, a witness to the results of irrigation. The broad, fat acres were almost level. There was no waste land, no coulées, no barren hills to discount its value. Every foot of it could be irrigated, and most of it was actually irrigated and cultivated.

Dunne's eye followed the lines of the ditches, marked by margins of green willows. They cut through the fields of wheat, of oats, of alfalfa, timothy, and red clover. They were the main arteries. From them branched veins supplying the fields with the water that gave them life — the water without which the land was waste and barren; but with which it bore marvellously with the stored

fertility of fallow centuries. Away at one end of the ranch, sheltered to north and west by low hills, was the ranch house itself, surrounded by young orchards, the stables, the corrals, the granaries, the cattle sheds, tool and implement houses. At that distance, in the clear, dry air, they looked like toys, miniatures, sharply defined in angle and shadow. So, too, the stock grazing in the fields were of lilliputian dimensions.

From where he sat in the saddle Dunne could see the Coldstream, scarcely more than a large creek, dignified in that land of dryness by the name of river, whose source was in the great green glaciers and everlasting snows of the hills. Its banks were green with willow and cottonwood. It was a treasure stream of untold value. With it the land prospered; without it the land and the men who peopled the land must fail.

"And that ranch, and others like it," Dunne muttered through his teeth, "must go dry and back to brown prairie unless the owners sell out to that old holdup, York, at his own price. Well, Mr. York —— You yellow devil!"

The last words did not refer to Cromwell York. For, without provocation or preliminaries, the buckskin's head had dived between his legs, his back arched like an indignant cat's, and with a vicious squeal he began to pitch.

Dunne drew his quirt and let him have it. The

brown, plaited leather played like lightning on quarters, flanks, cached head, and flattened ears.

"No work, and a bellyful of oats three times a day!" he gritted. "Forgotten who's your boss, hey? I'll show you, you hammer-headed, saffron-hided ——"

"Stay with him, Casey!"

Dunne turned his head, and shut his teeth upon forthcoming references to his steed's pedigree. A girl, brown, lean, aquiline of feature, sat astride a big slashing bay, and watched the contest with amusement. Dunne's face, red from exertion, deepened in colour; for some of his remarks, though exceedingly apposite, had not been intended for feminine ears. He answered, between pitches, in the vernacular:

"You bet I will, Sheila! Go to it, old son! Bump to glory if you like!"

But as suddenly as he had begun the buckskin desisted. He heaved a sigh, stood still, and turned a mildly inquiring, backward eye on his rider. It was as if he had said: "What! Still there? You surprise me!"

Sheila McCrae laughed. "He's passing it off as a joke, Casey."

"He nearly got me, the old sinner," said Dunne. "Now he'll be good till next time. You miserable, imitation bad horse, some day I'll manhandle you."

"Shiner knows you won't," the girl commented.

"He knows you're fond of him. You'll quirt him when he pitches, and then give him an extra feed."

"Well, maybe," Casey admitted shamelessly. "I like the old hyena. I've frazzled out leather on his hide that cost more than he did, but I never went after him right. He certainly can drift when he has to. What's the news, Sheila? All well at the ranch?"

She nodded, running a keen eye over his face. "All well. But you're the news bureau, Casey."

"Am I?" he said. "Well, then, I haven't a piece of good news in my saddlebags — not one."

"I knew it," she said. "Well, it can't be helped, Casey. There will be some way out. Let's go on to the ranch. Supper will be ready. Most of the men won't come till afterward. I won't be at your council of war, but I want you to let me know just what you decide on."

"Of course," he replied. "You've got a better head than most men, Sheila. I don't know what we will do — haven't a notion. It looks as though we were up against a tough proposition."

His dejection was apparent, and, womanlike, she tried to cheer him. Some way would be found. The action of the railway was so high-handed and unjust that it could not succeed. But though she spoke cheerfully, her keen eyes were troubled, and her face was clouded as they rode up to the ranch.

They found Donald McCrae at the stables. He

was a dark-faced giant of a man, and for all his years carried himself as straight as a young pine. All his life had been spent on the frontier. He had seen it move westward, and had moved with it from the Great Lakes across the Great Plains. He had seen it vanish, as the wild pigeon and the buffalo had gone — mysteriously, in a season, almost. Wheat fields, etched in green and gold, lay where he had made his lonely camps; orchards nestled by little lakes and in mountain valleys where he had trapped the beaver; strings of brass-bound, vestibuled coaches whirled where he had ridden his pony with the pack train shuffling behind. And here, on the Coldstream, he had made his last stand, taken up land, and turned, when past his prime, to the quiet life of a rancher.

"Light down, light down, Casey!" he called. "Put your cayuse in the stable. Give me Beaver Boy, Sheila. Go up to the house and fix us some whiskey with a chip of ice in it, like a good girl. Stir up the Chink as you go through, and make him rustle supper in a hurry. We'll be right in." He took his daughter's horse, and in the stable turned to Dunne.

"Well?" he demanded tersely.

"Nothing," Casey replied. "They stand their hand."

"I was afraid of it," said McCrae. "And they outhold us, Casey."

"Yes. Too much money."

"Will they buy us?"

"No. York offered to buy me. I was to be a decoy for the rest, I think. I refused. Now he will freeze us out."

"Will he?" said McCrae heavily. "Will he? Maybe so. And maybe ——" He did not complete the sentence, but stood at the door, scowling at the fair fields. "Twenty years back, Casey — yes, ten, even — if a man jumped my staking I'd have known what to do. We own this water. What's the difference? Can't the law help us? Do we have to help ourselves?"

"It may come to that," Casey replied. "Yes, it's pretty nearly come to that, McCrae. I saw a lawyer — one of the best in the business. He says the odds are against us. They will appeal and appeal — carry it up to the highest court. Meanwhile our land will be dry likely. We're out on a limb. If we hang on they shoot, and if we drop off they skin us."

"I guess that's so," said McCrae. "It's a bad fix any way you look at it. There's the ranch. That ain't so much, far's I'm concerned. I've been broke before, and I can rustle for myself for years yet. But there's my wife and Sheila and Alec. It's theirs. I worked for them. It's all I've got to leave them. You see, Casey, I can't stand to lose it."

"I know," said Casey sympathetically. "It's

a hard position. Look here, Donald, if you wish it I'll vote for breaking our pool, and each man doing the best he can for himself."

"No, I didn't mean that," said McCrae. "The railway wouldn't give us a fair price, and nobody else would buy with this hanging over. I'll stick. But you, now, it's some different with you. You're young, you ain't married. It's your stake, of course, but then you've got time left you to get another. They offered to buy you out. I don't know but you'd best take their offer. That'll give you something to start on. None of us will think the less of you for it."

"The agreement was that we were to fight this to a finish. If we sold out the railway was to buy all or none. If you can stay with that I can."

"But then, you see, Casey ——"

"I see, Donald. You know me better than that."

McCrae slapped him on the shoulder with a huge hand, and his voice took on the Gaelic accent of his childhood learned from his father, that McCrae who had in his time ruled a thousand miles of wilderness for the great fur company.

"I do know ye, boy, and it is proud I will be of it. There's Sheila at the door, callin' us. A toss of liquor and a bite — it will put the heart in us again. We must cheer up for the women, lad."

But in spite of this resolution supper was not a merry meal. Talk was spasmodic, interrupted

by long silences. Mrs. McCrae — slight, gentle, motherly, with wavy silver hair — was plainly worried. Her husband brooded unconsciously over his plate. Sheila and Casey, conversing on topics which neither was thinking about, blundered ridiculously. And the son of the house, Alec McCrae, a wiry, hawk-faced young man of twenty-two, strongly resembling his sister, was almost silent.

Soon after supper the ranchers who had banded together for mutual protection began to arrive by saddle and buckboard. Men of all ages, they comprised a dozen descents and nationalities, the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon strains predominating.

There was Oscar Swanson, heavy, slow-moving, blond as Harold Haarfagar, a veritable Scandinavian colossus; Wyndham, clean-bred, clean-built, an English gentleman to his fingers' tips; old Ike James, whose tongue carried the idiom and soft-slurring drawl of his native South; Eugéne Brulé, three parts Quebec French and one part Cree; Carter, O'Gara, Bullen, Westwick, and half a dozen others.

One and all they were wind-and-sun tanned, steady of eye, mostly quiet and brief of speech. Life was a serious business with them just then. Their ranches were their all. They had given hostages to competence. Up to a year ago they had believed themselves lucky, independent, on the way to modest fortune. Then came alarming rumours; next, construction of works confirming the rumours. Now

they were come to hear the worst or best from the lips of their envoy, Casey Dunne.

They listened as he gave details of his interviews with York and Wade, lips grimly wrapped around cigars and pipe stems, troubled eyes straining through the blue smoke at the speaker.

"And you couldn't get an injunction?" said Wyndham.

"No. The judge said that the mere fact of building a dam did not show an intention to interfere with anybody's rights."

"Didn't — eh?" snapped Carter, at high tension. "Then I'd like to know what would show it!"

"So would I," said Dunne. "Anyway, what the judge said went. The long and short of it is that we can't go to law till they actually take our water. Wade advises us to sell out if we can get a fair price. And that's all I have to report, gentlemen."

"A fair price!" exclaimed Carter. "That's all right to talk about — but who'll give us one? The railway won't buy — it's cheaper to freeze us out. Nobody else will. And, if it comes to that, what is a fair price? Land is boosting everywhere. If we sold now we'd just be robbing ourselves."

"S'pose they starts to rustle our water and we go to law," said old James, "does this here lawsuit tangle up things so's't we get plenty of water till the case is tried?"

"I'm afraid not," Casey replied. "That's the

worst of it. Wade seemed to think that once they got the water they could keep it until the case was settled by the last court of appeal. And that would put us out of business."

"It's sure a mean jack pot," said James. "It looks like they have it on us every way. The prospects for our emergin' winners ain't cheerin' none, but, gents, speakin' for myself alone, I wouldn't sell at no price. I'm aimin' to live where I be till youalls beds me down for keeps. I reckon I'll stay with the game while I got a chaw and a ca'tridge left. I may be froze out, but dog-gone my ol' hide if I'll be bluffed out. This here ain't none different from claim jumpin'. I own my water, and I'm goin' to keep on havin' it. And the man that shets it off will be mighty apt to see how they irrigate them green fields 'way over yander 'cross the River Jordan."

His words were like fire in dry straw.

"That's right, Uncle Ike!" cried Carter.

"By George I'm with you myself!" cried Wyndham.

"*Moi aussi!*" exclaimed Brulé. "By damn, yes!"

"Yes, let 'em try it!" cried young Alec McCrae, his eyes gleaming like those of a fierce young hawk that sights its first quarry. "Let 'em try it!" he repeated ominously, nodding to himself.

But on the excitement of the others Donald

McCrae's words fell like an icy douche: "Men, this is plain foolishness. Alec, let me hear no more of it from you. James, you should know better. We can't enforce claim law here. The old days are gone."

"I ain't gone yet, nor you ain't," old James replied, his eyes gleaming balefully through slitted lids. "I give it out now that I don't set quiet and see my ditches go dry. Long's the law won't help us — and the law never gave no action in the West nohow — I'm goin' to help myself. I ain't raisin' the long yell for partners, neither!"

"You can't bring back the old days," McCrae repeated. "I stand to lose as much as any man here, but shooting one or two men who are doing what they are paid to do won't help us. You all know that."

"That's so," Casey admitted. "That's the last thing we can afford to do."

"Well, maybe you boys are right," said the old man reluctantly. "Maybe I ain't up to date. But what you goin' to do? You got to do somethin'."

"Yes," said Wyndham. "They are getting ahead with their work. It won't be long till that dam is finished. Then they'll take the water from us, that's certain."

But here Big Oscar received an inspiration. He had been listening carefully, casting mildly inquiring blue eyes on the speakers. He was a good listener, was Oscar, and he seldom spoke. His mental engine,

so far as could be judged by its verbal expression, turned over stiffly. Apparently it had never been run enough to be smoothed down — at least in English. But his contribution to the debate at this juncture was noteworthy. Said he:

"Say, Ay tenk Ay blow dat dam, easy!"

They stared at him for a moment, while the suggestion took root. It was obvious that if the dam were destroyed the water would remain theirs until it was rebuilt. True, its destruction would be a lawless act, amounting to a declaration of war; but war on them had already been declared. They would be merely striking the first blow, and here was the logical spot to strike.

"Good boy, Oscar," said Carter. "I believe that's the answer.'

"What do you think, McCrae?" asked Wyndham.

"I'm against violence in any form," said McCrae slowly. "But they are forcing it on us. They want to steal our ranches. It amounts to that. This is the only thing we can do, and when we do it we'll do it right."

A round of applause greeted his concluding words. Old Ike James whispered to his neighbour:

"This here Highland Scotch stock is sure a funny proposition. What they start with a pra'ar they're mighty apt to end with a gun. Ol' Donald's a sure-'nough wolf when he gets goin'."

" And you, Dunne?" asked Wyndham.

"I'm in. I guess it's a case. Oscar, you have a great head. When shall we start the fireworks, and who's to start 'em?"

Oscar, flattered by the compliment and the unusual attention, picked up his hat. "Ay ban good powder man. Ay tenk Ay start him now when Ay gat some powder," said he. He smiled at them serenely. "Mebbe if t'ree, four you faller come by me you svear Ay ban home all night?" he suggested ingenuously.

But there was an objection to the immediate execution of the plan. They were just then getting all the water they needed. The farther ahead they could set the date of the destruction of the dam while retaining the water, the farther off would be the date when it could be rebuilt, as they had no doubt it would be. Thus they might tide through the hot, dry summer. Whereas, if it were blown up now it might be repaired and their water taken when they needed it most.

Just then it seemed wise to pursue a policy of masterly inactivity. But the mere fact of having settled on a course of action cleared the air, cheered them. In place of a despondent lethargy there was a nervous tension, as before a battle. They laughed and joked amid the bobbing stable lanterns as they harnessed and saddled; and they rode away from Talapus Ranch one and all in better spirits than they had come.

CHAPTER V

NO ONE has ever satisfactorily explained the rapidity with which news travels in sparsely settled communities. But the fact remains undisputed. Also the further fact that its accuracy is in inverse ratio to its rapidity, which does not need so much explanation. The men who had been at Talapus said nothing of the meeting, nothing of the purpose of it. And yet the gathering was speedily known from one end of the country to the other in conjunction with startling rumours, none of them authentic or traceable, but all disquieting. The report gained currency that the ranchers contemplated nothing less than an armed attack on the ditch and dam construction camps, for the purpose of running the workmen out of the country.

This came to the ears of Sleeman, who was the local sales agent of the railway's land department; and Sleeman passed it on to his chief, who thought it of sufficient importance to put up to York, seeing that that gentleman was responsible for the conception of the department's policy in this instance.

York, while not attaching much importance to the story, thought of the remarks of Casey Dunne. It

was just possible that the ranchers might perpetrate some hostile act. It happened, too, that at this time the engineer in charge of the Coldstream irrigation project took sick, necessitating the appointment of a new man. And it further happened that another engineer in the railway's employ, named Farwell, had got through with a difficult piece of tunnelling, and was ready for fresh work.

"I'll send Farwell down there," said York, speaking to Carrol, who was the head of his land department.

Now, Farwell was altogether too good a man to waste on a little, puttering job like this. He had seen service in half a dozen countries, always with credit to himself, and he was in line for big promotion. But against his undoubted ability and the fact that he was a tremendous driver, who spared no one, not even himself, was the further fact that he was harsh, domineering, impatient, lacking tact or diplomacy. He was a fighter by instinct. He preferred to break through than to go around. He antagonized rather than conciliated. But in the event of real trouble he was there with the genuine, hall-marked goods, as he had shown on several occasions when a hard man had been needed. The land department, however, had it's own staff, and Carrol did not like the importation of an outsider.

"No need to send Farwell," said he. "We can look after it ourselves."

"Farwell's the best man we can have there if anything goes wrong," said York positively. "He'll bring these ranchers to time. I'll send him."

Farwell descended on the Coldstream country in a bitter temper, for the job was far beneath his professional dignity as he looked at it, and he knew that in the meantime others would get better work to which he considered himself entitled. Indeed, he had come within an ace of resigning, and had insisted, as a condition, on a definite promise of something very good in the immediate future.

When he stepped off the train at the little Coldstream station he was already prejudiced against the country, its inhabitants, and its future; and what he saw as the train rumbled away into the distance did not tend to improve his temper.

Coldstream itself for years had amounted to little more than a post-office address. From the time of its building in the days of a boom which had no foundation, and therefore no permanence, it had retrogressed steadily. Now it was picking up. But although times were beginning to improve, it still bore many of the earmarks of an abandoned camp. The struggle for life during the lean years was more apparent in outward sign than was the present convalescence. Most of the houses were now occupied, but almost all were unpainted, stained gray and brown by wind and sun and snow, forlorn and hid-

eous things of loosened boards and flapping ends of tarred sheeting.

Although it was only spring, the road which wound from nowhere between the unsightly shacks was ankle deep in dust. The day was unseasonably warm, the air still. The dust lay on the young leaves of the occasional clumps of cottonwoods, and seemed to impregnate the air so that it was perceptible to the nostrils — a warm, dry, midsummer smell, elusive, but pervasive. The whole land swam and shimmered in hot sunshine. The unpainted buildings danced in it, blurring with the heat waves. Save for the occasional green of cottonwoods, the land lay in the brown nakedness of a dry spring, wearying the eye with its sameness.

Farwell swore to himself at the prospect, feeling his grievance against his employers and the world at large become more acute. He considered himself ill-used, slighted, and he registered a mental vow to rush his work and be quit of the accursed place at the earliest possible moment.

The individual who seemed to combine the functions of station agent and baggage hustler approached, wheeling a truck. He was a small man, gray-headed, with a wrinkled, wizened face, and eyes of faded blue. To him the engineer addressed himself.

"I'm Farwell," said he.

The agent halted the truck, smiled in friendly

fashion, swung around, and presented his left ear cupped in his left hand. At the same time a strange, pungent odour assailed Farwell's nostrils.

"What did yez say?" he asked. "Onforch'-nately me right a-cowstick organ is temp'rar'ly to the bad from shootin' a po-o-olecat. The gun busted on me, and I massacreed the marauder wid an ax. Did iver ye disthroy a skunk wid an ax? Then don't. Avoid mixin' it wid the od'riferous animals. Faix, I've buried me clothes — it was a new nightshirt, a flannel wan that I had on — and scrubbed meself wid kerosene and whale-oil soap that I keep f'r the dog, and I'm no bed of vi'lets yet. I can see ye wrinkle yer nose, and I don't blame yez. I'll move to the down-wind side of yez. Ye see, it was like this: The t'ief iv the wurruld was in me chicken house ——"

"I said I was Farwell," that gentleman interrupted.

"Farrel, is ut?" said the station agent. "I knowed a Farrel thirty years gone. W'u'd he be yer father, now? His people come from Munster, if I mind right. Ye do not favour him, but maybe ye take after yer mother. Still, I'm thinkin' ye can't be his son, on account of yer age; though he turned Mormon, and I heerd ——"

"I said Farwell, not Farrel," the engineer interpolated. "Richard K. Farwell." He thought it all the introduction necessary.

The station agent extended a welcoming hand. "Me own name is C. P. Quilty," said he, "the initials indicatin' Cornelius Patrick, and I'm glad to know ye. There's mighty few drummers stops off here now, but trade's bound to pick up, wid the land boom an' all." A sidelong glance at the perfecto clenched between Farwell's teeth. "W'u'd seegyars be yer line, now? I'm a judge of a seegyar meself, though the bum smokes they do be makin' nowadays has dhruv me to the pipe. No offense to you, Mr. Farrel, for no doubt ye carry a better line nor most. If ye like I'll introduce ye to Bob Shiller, that keeps the hotel ——"

"Look here," snapped Farwell, at the end of his patience, "I'm Farwell, the engineer come down to take charge of this irrigation job. I want to know if there are any telegrams for me, and where the devil the camp is, and how I get to it. And that's about all I want to know, except whether I can get a bath at this hotel of Shiller's."

And Cornelius Patrick Quilty shook hands with him again.

"To think iv me takin' ye fur a drummer, now!" he exclaimed in self-reproach. "Sure, I've often heard of yez. I live over beyant, in the shack wid the picket fince on wan side iv ut. The other sides blowed down in a dust storm a year gone, and I will erect them some day when I have time. But ye can't miss me place, more be token half the front iv

the house was painted wanst. They say the paint was stole, but no matter. Bein' both officials iv the comp'ny, Mr. Farrel, we will have much to talk over. No doubt ye have been referred to me for details iv the disturbin' rumours. Well, it's this wa-ay: I am in the service iv the comp'ny, and I dhraw me pay wid regularity, praise be, so that I w'u'd not for a moment think of questionin' the wisdom iv the policy iv me superiors ——"

"That's right — don't!" snapped Farwell. "Now, get me those telegrams, if there are any, and tell me what I want to know."

A hurt look crept into Mr. Quilty's eyes of faded blue.

"I regret that I have no messages for ye, *sor*," said he. "The comp'ny's land agent, Mr. Sleeman, will take ye wherever ye want to go in his autymobile. Ye will see his sign as ye go uptown. But, speakin' as man to man, Mr. Farwell, and havin' the interests of thim that pays me to heart, I w'u'd venture on a little advice."

"Well, what is it?" asked Farwell.

"It's this," said Quilty. "The men hereabouts — the ranchers — is sore. Don't make them sorer. Duty is duty, and must be done, iv coorse. But do ut as aisy as ye can." He broke off, eying two riders who were approaching the station.

"Who are those people?" asked Farwell.

"The man is Misther Casey Dunne, and the young leddy is Miss Sheila McCrae," Quilty informed him.

"I've heard of Dunne," said Farwell, who had done so from York. "Who's the McCrae girl? Is she one of the same bunch?"

"*Miss* McCrae is a *leddy*," said Quilty, with quiet dignity. "And Casey Dunne is — is a dom good friend of mine."

The riders drew up at the platform, and Casey Dunne hailed the agent. "Hallo, Corney! Any freight for Talapus or Chakchak?" The last was the name of his own ranch, and in the Chinook jargon signified an eagle.

"Freight for both iv yez," Quilty replied. "But sure ye won't be takin' it on the cayuses. Howdy, Miss Sheila! Will ye 'light and try the comp'ny's ice wather wid a shot iv a limon, or shall I bring ye a pitcher?"

"I'll 'light, Mr. Quilty, thank you," said Sheila. She swung down from Beaver Boy, letting the lines trail, and Dunne dropped off Shiner.

Quilty introduced the engineer punctiliously. Farwell raised his hat, and bowed to the girl, but did not offer his hand to Casey Dunne.

"I've heard of you — from York," he said meaningly.

"I've heard that Mr. York has a wonderful memory for faces and names," said Casey. "Quite flat-

tering to be remembered by him. I've only met him once."

"He remembers you very well," Farwell returned dryly.

Sheila McCrae stood by, watching them, hearing the rasp of steel beneath the apparently casual words. And unconsciously she measured the men, one against the other.

Farwell was slightly the taller and much the heavier. He created the impression of force, of dominance. The heavy, square chin, the wide, firm mouth, the black, truculent eyes beneath heavy brows, all marked the master, if not the tyrant. His body was thick and muscular, and he stood solidly, confident of himself, of his position, a man to command.

Casey Dunne was lighter, leaner, more finely drawn. Lacking the impression of pure force, of sheer power, he seemed to express the capacity for larger endurance, of better staying qualities, of greater tensile strength. He was cast in another mould, a weapon of a different pattern. Farwell might be compared to a battle-axe; Dunne to a rapier.

And being of the battle-axe type Farwell saw no reason to mince matters with Dunne, whom he looked upon as a leader of the alleged trouble makers, and therefore directly responsible for his, Farwell's, presence in that confounded desert.

"No," he said, "York doesn't forget much. And he hears quite a lot, too. I've come down to finish this dam, and complete the irrigation ditches, and I'm going to rush the job."

"It's pretty well along, I hear," Dunne commented. "You'll be putting the finishing touches to it pretty soon. Quite a nice piece of work, that. You want to be careful of the sidehill ditches, though. They wash, sometimes."

Farwell was taken aback. There was no hint of insincerity in the other's tone. It was impersonal, as if he were not at all concerned.

"I'll be careful enough," he returned. He would have liked to tell Dunne that he was also prepared to take care of any trouble that might arise, but on second thought he decided to wait for a better opening. "I'll be plenty careful of a good many things," he added significantly.

"Nothing like it," Dunne rejoined. "Water finds the weak spots every time. Well, good morning, Mr. Farwell. Glad to see you at my ranch any time. Ask anybody where it is."

Farwell stared after him for a moment, a little puzzled and by no means satisfied with himself. He had come openly contemptuous of the ranchers, thinking of them as rough, unlettered farmers who must necessarily stand in awe of him. But here was a different type. "Pretty smooth proposition, that Dunne," he growled to himself. "'Water finds

the weak spots,' hey! Now, I wonder what he meant by that?"

He picked up his grip, and walked up into the town, finding the company's office without difficulty, and introduced himself to Sleeman, the sales agent, whom he had never met.

Mr. Sleeman possessed a shrewd eye, and a face indicative of an ability to play a very good game. He was in his shirt sleeves for greater comfort, and he smoked particularly strong plug tobacco in a brier pipe.

"What's in these yarns, anyhow?" Farwell asked, when they had got down to business.

"Ask me something easier," Sleeman replied. "I gave headquarters all I heard. If I were you I'd keep my eyes open."

"I'll do that," said Farwell. "These fellows always do a lot of talking, and let it go at that."

"Not here," said Sleeman. "The men who will be affected aren't doing any talking at all. That looks bad to me. They are just standing pat and saying nothing. But you can bet they are doing some thinking. Mighty bad lot to run up against if they start anything — old-timers, ex-punchers, prospectors, freighters, and fur men, with a sprinkling of straight farmers. The worst of it is that these rumours are hurting us already, and they'll hurt us worse."

"How?"

"Landlookers hear them, and shy off. No man wants to buy into a feud with his neighbours — to buy land with water that somebody else thinks he ought to have. Before I can make a showing in actual sales this thing has got to be settled."

"Huh!" said Farwell. "Well, I'll finish the job, and turn the water down the ditches, and that's all I have to do. I met one of these fellows at the station — Dunne, his name is."

"Oh, you met Casey Dunne. And what do you think of him?"

"Don't like him; he's too smooth. Looked me square in the eye, and told me to be careful with sidehill ditches, and so on, just as if it didn't affect him at all. Too innocent for me. I had a notion to tell him he wasn't fooling me a little bit."

"H'm!" said Sleeman. "Well, I give Casey credit for being a good man. He has a big stake here — owns a lot of land besides his ranch. It's make or break with him."

"Then I'm sorry for him. He had a girl with him — McCrae her name is. Who's she?"

"Her father owns Talapus Ranch. It's the biggest and best here. Good people, the McCraes."

"And I suppose Dunne's going to marry her? Is that it?"

"I never heard so. But if he is I don't blame him; she's all right, that girl."

Farwell grunted. He had rather liked Sheila's looks, but, being a man of violent prejudices, and disliking Dunne instinctively, he found it easy to dislike his friends. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he announced. "I'm going to put it up to these fellows straight the first chance I get that we don't care a hang for anything they may do. If they want trouble they can come a-running."

"Well," Sleeman commented, "of course, I'm here to sell land. The company is my boss, and naturally I back its play. But my personal opinion is that it would have been better to have bought those fellows out, even at fancy prices, than to ride over them roughshod. They're sore now, and you can't wonder at it. If I were you I'd go easy — just as easy as I could."

"Nonsense!" snorted Farwell. "That's what that old fool of a mick down at the station told me. How the devil does the company happen to have such an old fossil on the job?"

"Quilty's a left-over from construction days. He's been here ever since steel was laid. They say he averted a bad smash once by sheer nerve or pure Irish luck. Anyway, he has a sort of guarantee of his job for life. Not a bad old boy when you get to know him."

"He ought to be fired, and a younger man put in

his place," said Farwell. "He talks too much. Good Lord! He's like an endless record!"

"Pshaw! What do you care?" said Sleeman. "He's better than a talking machine in this place. Well, come over to the hotel, and afterward I'll run you out to the camp."

CHAPTER VI

SHEILA McCRAE and Beaver Boy and Casey Dunne and Shiner drifted through the golden afternoon just ahead of a dust cloud of their own making. Sheila rode astride, in the manner of a country where side saddles are almost unknown. Her stiff-brimmed pony hat was pushed back because of the heat. Sometimes she rode with it in her hand, careless of the dust which powdered her masses of dark, neatly coiled hair. The action revealed her keen, cleanly cut features, so strongly resembling her brother's. But the resemblance was softened by femininity; for young McCrae's visage was masculine and hawklike, and under excitement fierce, even predatory; while his sister's, apart from sex, was more refined, more thoughtful, with a grave sweetness underlying the firmness.

The two were unusually silent as the horses kicked off mile after mile. Sheila roused herself first, and looked at her companion. Because his hat was pulled low she could see but little of his face save the mouth and chin; but the former was compressed and the latter thrust out at a decidedly aggressive angle.

"A penny for them, Casey!"

"Take 'em free," he returned. "I was wondering whether we had any chance to beat this game, and I can't see it. The bank roll against us is too big. It will get our little pile in the end, just as sure as fate."

"Well, you can't help that, can you?" she commented sharply. "What do you want to do — lie down and quit? You wouldn't do that. Brace up!"

"That's the talk," he acknowledged. "That's what I need now and then. Perhaps I get a pessimistic view when I'm trying for an impartial one."

"What do you think of this Farwell person?"

"Farwell represents the railway in more ways than one. He takes what he wants — if he's strong enough. He's some bully — and so is the railway. But he isn't a bluff — and neither is the railway. He's had experience — plenty of it — and, on a guess, I should say that he is sent down here to take care of any trouble that may start. He is hostile already. You can see it."

"Yes." And after a moment's silence she asked: "What is going to start, Casey?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Of course you know. Dad won't say a word, and Sandy makes wise remarks about girls who try to butt into men's affairs. I'm left out, and it's the first time *that* has ever happened to me. Nice, isn't it?"

"No, it's confoundedly annoying. All the same, Sheila, they're quite right."

"But why? I'm no silly kid — no chattering, gossipy young lady. I have as much interest in the ranch as Sandy. I know as much about it and the work of it as he does, and I do my share of it. Even Mr. Dunne has occasionally honoured me by asking for my opinion. And now I'm left out like a child. It isn't fair."

"From that angle it looks rather raw," he acknowledged. "Still, it's better that you shouldn't know. In that case you can't be forced to give evidence against your own people and your friends."

She glanced at him, a little startled. "What rot, Casey!"

"Not a bit of it. Anything we can do must be against the law. Suspicion will be directed at us from the outset. You must see that."

"Yes, I see it," she assented thoughtfully. "Very well, I'll be good to the extent of not asking questions. But you can't expect me to be deaf and blind."

"Of course not," he assented and began to talk of the ranch work. She listened, making occasional shrewd comments, offering suggestions which showed that she understood such matters thoroughly.

"Why shouldn't we ride around by Chakchak?" she asked. "I haven't seen it for a month, and there's plenty of day left. And then I can go on to Talapus by myself."

"Trying to shake me?"

"No. But why should you trail along with me? I've ridden all over the country alone. I do it every day."

"Hush, Sheila! Let me tell you a secret. I ride with you because I like to."

"Oh, blarney! That's what it is to have a mick ancestry. I suppose I'll have to own up that if I didn't like you to ride with me I wouldn't let you do it."

Casey grinned. Their mutual liking was genuine and so far unsentimental. They were of the same breed — the breed of the pioneer — and their hearts held the same seldom-voiced but deeply rooted love for the same things; the great, sun-washed spaces winnowed by the clean winds, the rosy dawns, violet dusks and nights when the earth scents hung heavy, almost palpable, clinging to the nostrils, the living things of fur and feather bright of eye and wary of habit. But most of all unconsciously they loved and cherished the feeling of room, of space in which to live and breathe and turn freely.

"The present time being inopportune, and Shiner's temper too uncertain for a further avowal of my sentiments," he said, "I suggest that we turn off here and hit a few high spots for Chakchak. Stir up that slothful cayuse of yours. Maybe there's a lope left in him somewhere. See if you can comb it out with a quirt."

"I like your nerve!" she exclaimed. "Beaver Boy can run the heart out of that old buzzard-head of yours and come in dry-haired. Come on, or take my dust!"

The hoofbeats drummed dull thunder from the brown earth, and the dust cloud behind drew out and lengthened with the speed of their going. Side by side they swept through the silent land, breasting small rises, swooping down slopes, breathing their horses whenever they came to heavier ascents.

Sometimes as they rode knee touched knee. It gave Casey Dunne a strange but comfortable feeling of comradeship. He looked at the woman beside him, appreciating her firm, easy seat in the stock saddle, her management of Beaver Boy, now eager to prove his prowess against the buckskin's. He noted the rich colour lying beneath the tan of the smooth cheeks, the rounded brown throat, the poise of the lithe, pliant body and the watchful tension of the strong arms and shoulders as the big bay fought hard for his head and a brief freedom to use his full strength and speed in one mad heartbreaking burst. But most of all he noted and was attracted by the level, direct, fearless stare beneath the slightly drawn brows into the distances.

A brown girl in a brown land! It came to Casey Dunne, who was imaginative within the strict seclusion of his inner self, that she typified their land, the West, in youth, in fearlessness, in potentialities

yet lying fallow, unawakened, in fruitfulness to come. What of the vagrant touch of the woman, the gold of the day, the clean, dry air and the glory of motion, the chord of romance within him vibrated and began to sing.

It invested her momentarily with a new quality, a new personality. She was no longer the Sheila McCrae he had known so well. She was the Spirit of the Land, a part of it — she was Sheila of the West; and her heritage was plain and mountain, gleaming lake and rushing river, its miles numbered by thousands, its acres by millions — a land for a new nation.

How many Sheilas, he wondered — young, strong, clean of blood, straight of limb — had ridden since the beginning of time into the new lands, and borne their part in peopling them. Fifty years before, her prototypes had ridden beside the line of crawling, creaking prairie schooners across the great plains toward the setting sun; little more than fifty years before that they had ridden down through the notches of the blue Alleghenies into the promised land of Kain-tuck-ee, the Dark and Bloody Ground, beside buckskin-clad, deckard-armed frontiersmen. Perhaps, centuries before that, her ancestresses had ridden with burly, skin-clad warriors out of the great forests of northern Europe down to the pleasant weaker south. But surely she was the peer of any of them — this woman riding knee to knee with him,

the sloping sun in her clear, brown eyes, and the warm, sweet winds kissing her cheeks!

And so Casey Dunne dreamed as he rode — dreamed as he had not dreamed waking since the days when, a little boy, he had lain on warm sands beside a blue inland sea on summer's afternoons and watched the patched sails of the stone hookers, and the wheeling, gray lake gulls, and heard the water hiss and ripple to the long, white beaches. And, as he dreamed, a part of boyhood's joy in mere life awoke in him again.

Chakchak Ranch came into view. Its cultivated area smaller than that of Talapus, it was nevertheless as scrupulously cared for. The one might have served as model for the other. Here, also, were the straight lines of the ditches, the squares of grain fields beginning to show green, the young orchards, the sleek, contented stock, the corrals, and outbuildings.

But, as became the residence of a bachelor, the ranch-house itself was less pretentious. It was a small bungalow, with wide verandas which increased its apparent size. There Casey lived with Tom McHale, his right-hand man and foreman. The hired men, varying in number constantly, occupied other quarters.

Casey would have helped Sheila to alight, but she swung down, stretching her limbs frankly after the hard ride.

"That's *going*," she said. "Beaver Boy was a brute to hold; he wanted to race Shiner. He nearly got away from me once. My wrists are actually lame." She drew off her long buckskin gauntlets, flexing her wrists cautiously, straightening her fingers, prolonging the luxury of relaxing the cramped sinews.

"Let us now eat, drink, and be merry," said Casey, "for to-morrow — well, never mind that. But what would you like? Coffee, tea, claret lemonade? Tell me what you want."

"Too hot for tea. I'd like a dust eraser — a cold drink about a yard long."

"Hey, you, Feng!" Casey cried, to a white-aproned, grinning Chinaman, "you catch two ice drink quick — *hiyu* ice, you savvy! Catch claret wine, catch cracker, catch cake. Missy *hiyu* dry, *hiyu* hungry. Get a hustle on you, now!"

Feng, understanding perfectly the curious mixture of pidgin and Chinook, vanished soft-footed. They entered the living room of the bungalow.

"Stretch out and be comfy while he's rustling it," said Casey, indicating a couch. He himself fell into a huge wicker chair, flung his hat carelessly at the table, and reached for a cigar box.

Sheila dropped on the couch with a satisfied sigh, stretching her arms above her head, her hands clasped, every muscle of her relaxing. The comparative coolness, the quiet, the soft cushions were

good after a day in the saddle. Down there on the Coldstream the strict proprieties did not trouble them. If any one had suggested to Sheila McCrae that she was imprudent in visiting a bachelor's ranch unchaperoned, she would have been both amazed and indignant. And it would have been unsafe to hint at such a thing to Casey Dunne. Indeed, the desirability of a chaperon never occurred to either of them; which was, after all, the best guarantee of the superfluity of that mark of an advanced civilization.

But in a moment Sheila was on her feet, arranging, straightening. "You're awfully untidy, Casey!" she said.

Indeed her comment was justified. The long table in the centre of the room was a litter of newspapers, magazines, old letters, pipes, and tobacco. Odd tools — a hammer, a file, a wrench, and a brad awl — mingled with them. On top of the medley lay a heavy revolver, with the cylinder swung out and empty, a box of cartridges, a dirty rag, and an oil can. In one corner stood half a dozen rifles and shotguns. From a set of antlers on the wall depended a case of binoculars, a lariat, and a pair of muddy boots. The last roused Sheila's indignation.

"Whatever do you hang up boots in your sitting room for?" she demanded.

"Why, you see," he explained, "they were wet, and I hung 'em up to dry. I guess I forgot 'em.

It's not the right place, that's a fact." He rose, took down the offending footgear, and tossed them through the open door into the next room. They thumped on the floor, and Sheila was not placated.

"That's just as bad. Why, they were covered with dried mud, and now it's all over the floor. You're shockingly careless. Don't you know that that makes work?"

"For Feng, you mean. That's what I pay him for — only he doesn't do it."

But she shook her head, brushing the excuse aside as trifling, unsatisfactory. "It's a bad habit. I pity your wife, Casey."

"Poor thing!"

"When you get one, I mean."

"Time enough to sympathize then. Now, Sheila, if it's all the same to you, don't muss that table up. I know where to find everything the way it is."

"Muss it up! I like that!" she responded. "Why, of all the old *junk!* Haven't you got a tool house? And it's an inch deep in dust." She extended her fingers in proof. "That dirty rag! And a gun and cartridges there for any one to pick up! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Don't you know better than that? Don't you know you shouldn't leave firearms and ammunition together? It's as bad as leaving them loaded, almost."

"That's Tom's gun. Sail into him."

"You shouldn't allow it."

"Allow it! I never touch another man's gun. Nobody comes in here but Feng, and he doesn't matter. What's a Chink more or less?"

"But it's the *principle*. And what's this — down here? Why, Casey, it's — it's a *hen!*"

It was a hen. In a space between two piles of newspapers, flanked by a cigar box, squatted a white fowl, very intent upon her own affairs.

"Shoo!" said Sheila. But the bird merely cocked a bright eye at her, and uttered a little warning, throaty sound. Casey laughed.

"That's Fluffy, and she's a lady friend of mine. Poor old Fluff, poor old girl! Don't scare her, Sheila. Can't you see she's busy?"

"Casey Dunne, do you mean to tell me that you allow a hen to lay in your sitting room, on your *table?*"

"Of course — when she's a nice little chicken like Fluffy. Why not? She doesn't do any harm."

"I never heard of such a thing. The place for hens is in the chicken run. Casey, you're simply *awful!* Your wife — oh, heavens, what a life she'll have!"

"Nobody could help liking Fluff," he replied. "She's really good company. I wish I could talk her talk. She has a fine line of conversation if I could only savvy it."

Sheila sat down with a hopeless gesture. Fond of all living things as she was, she could not under-

stand the tolerance that allowed a hen the run of the house. To her a hen was a hen, nothing more. She could name and pet a horse or a dog or any quadruped. But a hen! She could not understand.

But Feng entered with the two "ice drink" — a tray containing long glasses, tinkling ice, claret, lemons, cake, and biscuits. He set the tray upon the table. As he did so his hand came in contact with Fluffy. With a rasping cry of indignation she pecked him.

"Hyah!" cried Feng, startled, and reached for her impulsively.

Fluffy bounded from her nest, and fled shrieking for the door. Her fluttering wings brushed the contents of the tray. The long glasses and bottle capsized, rolled to the floor, and smashed, the crash of glass mingling with her clamour.

"What foh?" yelled Feng, in a fury. "Jim Kli, dam chickum spoiley icey dlink. *Hiyu* no good — all same son of a gun! S'pose me catch him, ling him neck!" And he darted after the hen, on vengeance bent.

But Casey caught him by the collar. "Never mind, Feng. That chicken all same my *tillikum*, you savvy. *Hiyu* good chicken; lay *hiyu* egg. You catch more ice drink!"

And when the angry Celestial had gone he lay back in his chair, and laughed till he was weak. Sheila laughed, too, at first half-heartedly, then more

heartily, and finally, as she reconstructed Feng's expression, in sheer abandonment of merriment, until she wiped her eyes and gasped for breath.

"Oh — oh!" she protested weakly; "my side hurts. I haven't had such a laugh for ages. Oh, Casey, that chicken all same my friend now, too. It's coming to her. That Chink — how mad he was! But what a mess! And claret stains so. Your rug ——"

She rose, impelled by her housewifely instincts to do what she could, and, glancing through the door, she saw a man standing by the veranda steps.

This was Tom McHale, Casey's friend and foreman. He was lean with the flat-bellied leanness that comes of years of hard riding, and a but partially subdued devil of recklessness lurked in his steady hazel eyes. He was a wizard with animals, and he derived a large part of his nourishment from Virginia leaf. He and Sheila were the best of friends.

"Howdy, Miss Sheila!" he greeted her. "I sure thought there was hostiles in the house. What you doin' to that there Chink? He's cussin' scand'lous. Casey been up to some of his devilment?"

"Come in and join us, Tom," said Casey. "Feng had a run-in with Fluff. Result, one bottle of claret and two glasses gone to glory."

"Also one Chink on the warpath," McHale added. "If I was in the insurance business I wouldn't write

no policy on that there hen. She's surely due to be soup flavourin'. She ain't got no more show than if the Oriental was a coon. He's talkin' now 'bout goin' back to China."

"He always does when he gets a grouch. I wish I could get a white man."

"A white man that *can* cook hates to stay sober long enough to build a bannock," said McHale. "Chink grub has one flavour, but it comes reg'lar, there's that about it."

Feng entered with fresh supplies, and they drank luxuriously, tinkling the ice in the glasses, prolonging the satisfaction of thirst. McHale went about his business. Sheila picked up her hat and gloves, declaring that she must be going. Casey insisted on accompanying her. He shifted his saddle to Dolly, a pet little gray mare; not because Shiner was tired, but because there was a hard ride in store for him on the morrow.

They rode into Talapus in time for supper. Afterward Casey and McCrae discussed the coming of Farwell, and its significance.

"I pumped Corney Quilty a little," said Casey. "This Farwell is a slap-up man, and they'd never waste him on this little job without some good reason. I'm told he's bad medicine. Unpleasant devil, he seems. I wonder if they've got wise at all? If they have it will be mighty interesting for us."

"I'll chance it," said McCrae. "Anyway, we'll all be in it."

"That's a comforting thought," said Dunne. As he rode home that night he went over the ranchers one by one; and he was quite sure that each was trustworthy.

CHAPTER VII

FARWELL took charge of his construction camps, and immediately began to infuse some of his own energy into his subordinates. But as a beginning he rode over the works, blue prints in hand, thus getting to know the contour of the country, and the actual location and run of the main canal and branch ditches, constructed and projected. With this knowledge safely filed away in his head, he proceeded to verify the calculations of others; for he had once had the bitter experience of endeavouring to complete work which had been based on the erroneous calculations of another man. He had been blamed for that, because it had been necessary to find a scapegoat for the fruitless expenditure of many thousands. So, having had his lesson, he was ever after extremely careful to check all calculations, regardless of the labour involved.

These things occupied him closely for some weeks. He saw scarcely anybody but his own men, nor did he wish to see anybody else. He intended to finish the job, and get out at something better. Therefore he plugged away day and night, and, so far as he could, forced others to do the same.

But the current of his routine was changed by so small a thing as a wire nail. He was returning from an inspection of his ditches, when his horse pulled up dead lame. Farwell, dismounting, found the nail imbedded to the head in the animal's hoof; and he could not withdraw it, though he broke his knife blade in repeated attempts. He swore angrily, not because it meant temporary inconvenience to himself, but because he sympathized with his horse; and, looping the reins over his arm, began to walk, the animal limping after him.

Half an hour of this slow progress brought him in sight of Talapus Ranch. It had been pointed out to him before; but it was with considerable reluctance that he decided, for his mount's sake, to turn into the trail to the house.

Sheila was on the veranda, and Farwell raised his hat.

"Miss McCrae, I think, You may remember me — Farwell. I'm sorry to trouble you, but my horse has picked up a nail. If I could borrow a pair of pliers or shoeing pincers ——"

"Of course. Father is at the stable. I'll show you."

Donald McCrae, just in from a day of irrigating, shook hands, and took the horse's hoof between his knees with the certainty of a farrier

"Right bang to the head," he observed, as he

tried for a grip. "I'll have it in a minute. Hold him, now! Steady, boy! There you are!"

With a twist and an outward wrench he held up the nail between the tips of the pincers. He released the hoof, but the horse held it clear of the ground.

"Sore," said McCrae. "A nasty brute of a piece of wire, too. That's a mighty lame cayuse. You won't ride him for a week — maybe two."

"He'll have to take me to camp, or I'll have to take him."

"And that might lame him for two months. Leave him here. I'll poultice the foot if it needs it. You stay and have supper. Afterward we'll drive you over."

Farwell demurred, surprised. He considered all the ranchers to be leagued against the railway, and in that he was not far wrong. In his mind it followed as a corollary that they were also hostile to him, as he was hostile to them.

"Thanks! It's very good of you, but, under the circumstances — you understand what I mean."

"You needn't feel that way," McCrae returned. "When this country was just country, and no more, a white man was always welcome to my fire, my blankets, and my grub, when I had it. It's no different now, at Talapus. You're welcome to what we have — while we have it. There's no quarrel between us that I know of."

"No, of course not," said Farwell, not quite at

his ease. If McCrae chose to put it on that footing he could not reasonably object. "Well, thanks very much. I'll be glad to accept your offer."

An excellent meal put him in better humour. By nature he was a hard man, who took life seriously, engrossed in his profession. He led a nomadic existence, moved continually from one piece of work to another, his temporary habitations ranging from modern hotels to dog tents and shacks. In all the world there was no spot that he could call home; and there was no one who cared a button whether he came or went. His glimpses of other men's homes were rare and fleeting, and he was apt to thank Heaven that he was not thus tied down.

But the atmosphere of the ranch appealed to him. Its people were not silly folk, babbling of trivial things which he neither understood nor cared to understand. Mrs. McCrae, as he mentally appraised her, was a sensible woman. In her husband — big, quiet, self-contained — he recognized a man as hard as himself. Young McCrae, silent, too grim of mouth for his years, was the makings of another hard man. But it was at Sheila that he looked the most, and at her if not to her his conversation was directed.

So much for the simple magic of a white dress. When he had seen her with Dunne, in a dusty riding costume, he had not been especially attracted. He had not thought of her since. Now, she seemed a

different person. He liked her level, direct glance, her low, clear voice, the quiet certainty of each movement of her brown hands. Farwell, though his acquaintance with the species was slight, recognized the hall mark. Unmistakably the girl was a lady.

Sheila, listening, felt that her estimate of Farwell needed revision. He was a bigger man than she had thought, stronger, and therefore a more formidable opponent. It seemed to her monstrous, incongruous, that he should be sitting there as a guest and yet be carrying out a project which would ruin them. But since he was a guest he had the rights of a guest.

Afterward she found herself alone with him on the veranda. Her father and brother had gone to the stables, and her mother was indoors planning the next day's housework.

"You smoke, Mr. Farwell?" she said. "I'll get you some cigars."

"I have some in my pocket, thanks."

"No. Talapus cigars at Talapus. That's the rule."

"If you insist on it." He lit a cigar, finding to his relief that it was very good indeed. "Well, Miss McCrae, I must say your hospitality goes the full limit. I'm rather overwhelmed by it."

"What nonsense! Supper, a cigar — that's not very burdensome surely."

"It's the way things are, of course," he explained. "I'm not blind. I know what you were thinking about — what you are thinking now."

"I doubt it, Mr. Farwell."

"Yes, I do. You are wondering how I have the nerve to eat your food and smoke your tobacco when I'm here on this irrigation job."

It was her thought stripped naked. She made a little gesture, scarcely deprecatory. Why protest when he had guessed so exactly?

"I'm glad you don't feel called on to lie politely," said Farwell. "I'm pretty outspoken myself. I don't blame you at all. I merely want to point out that if I weren't on this job some one else would be. You see that. I'm just earning my living."

She was silent. He went on:

"I'm not apologizing, you understand, and I'm not saying anything about the rights of the ranchers or of my employers, one or the other. I don't care about either. I'm just concerned with my own business."

"That is to say, the railway's," Sheila commented.

"I'm trying to point out that I'm a hired man, with no personal interest. But of course I'll do what I'm paid to do — and more. I never saw the time I didn't give full value for every dollar of my pay."

"I don't question it," said Sheila.

"You think I'm talking too much about myself,"

he said quickly. "That's so. I'm sorry. You people have treated me well, no matter what you thought, and I appreciate it. I've enjoyed the evening very much. I wonder" — he hesitated for a moment — "I wonder if you'd mind my riding over here once in a while?"

"Of course not — if you care to come," Sheila replied. Intuitively she divined that she had interested him, and she guessed by his manner that it was not his custom to be interested in young women. Apart from the ranchers' grievance against the corporation he represented, she had no reason for refusal. She rather liked his downrightness. Casey Dunne had said that he was a bit of a bully, but not a bluff. His extreme frankness, while it amused her, seemed genuine.

"Thank you!" he said. "I don't flatter myself that you want me particularly, and I'm quite satisfied with the bare permission. I'm not entertaining or pleasant, and I know it. I've been busy all my life. No time for — for — well, no time for anything but work. But this little job isn't going to keep me more than half busy. I've done all the hard work of it now."

"I didn't know it was so nearly finished."

"I mean I've been over the ground and over the figures, and I know all that is to be done. Now it's merely a question of bossing a gang. A foreman could do that."

Sheila could find no fault with the last statement. Obviously it was a fact. But the tone more than the words was self-assertive, even arrogant. She was unreasonably annoyed.

"Naturally you consider yourself above foreman's work," she commented, with faint sarcasm.

"I don't consider myself above any work when it's up to me to do it or see it left undone," he replied. "I've held a riveter and driven spikes and shimmed up ties before now. But a concern that pays a first-class man to do third-class work is robbing itself. This is the last time I'll do it. That's how I feel about it."

Sheila was not accustomed to hear a man blow his own horn so frankly. The best men of her acquaintance — her father, Casey Dunne, Tom McHale, and others — seldom talked of themselves, never bragged, never mentioned their proficiency in anything. She had been brought up to regard a boaster and a bluff as synonymous. To her an egotist was also a bluff. His bad taste repelled her. And yet he did not seem to stress the announcement.

"A first-class man should not waste his time," she observed, but to save her life she could not keep her tone free from sarcasm. He took up her meaning with extraordinary quickness.

"You think I might have let somebody else say that? Pshaw! I'm not mock-modest. I *am* a good man, and I'm paid accordingly. I want you to

know it. I don't want you to take me for a poor devil of a line runner."

"What on earth does it matter what I take you for?" said Sheila. "I don't care whether you have a hundred or a thousand a month. What difference does it make to me?"

"None — but it makes a whole lot to me," said Farwell. "I'm interested in my profession. I want to get to the top of it. I'm halfway up, and time counts. And then to be sent down here on this rotten job! Pah! it makes me sick."

"I'm glad to hear you admit that it's rotten," said Sheila. "It's outrageous — a straight steal."

He stared at her a moment, laughed, and shook his head.

"You don't understand me. It's rotten from my standpoint — too trivial to waste time on."

"It's rotten from our standpoint. Can't you get away from your supreme self for a moment? Can't you appreciate what it means to us?"

"I know exactly what it means, but I can't help it. You know — but you can't help it. What are you going to do, anyway?"

"I don't know," she admitted, thinking of her conversation with Casey Dunne.

"You're sure you don't? We heard rumours — I may as well tell you — that the ranchers were prepared to make trouble for us."

"Then you've heard more than I have."

He eyed her a moment in silence. She returned his glance unwaveringly.

"I'm glad to know it," he said at length. "I don't want a row. Now, you people here — on this ranch — why don't you sell and get out?"

She thought it brutally put. "In the first place, we don't want to sell out. And in the next place who would buy?"

"That's so," he said. "I guess you wouldn't find many buyers. Still, if you got the chance ——"

Whatever he was about to say was lost in a clamour of wheels and hoofs. Donald McCrae appeared in a buckboard drawn by a light team which he was holding with difficulty. He pulled them to a momentary halt.

"Now, if you're ready, Mr. Farwell. Jump in quick. These little devils won't stand. They haven't had any work for a week. All set? G'lang, boys!"

They started with a rear and a furious rush that flung Farwell back against the seat. In two hundred yards McCrae had them steadied, hitting a gait that fairly ate up the miles.

Farwell sat silent, chewing an unlighted cigar, turning a new idea over and over in his mind. This idea was to arrange for the purchase of Talapus Ranch by the railway's land department. None knew better than he that the taking of their water would mean absolute ruin to the McCraes, as it did

to others. For the others he cared nothing. But he told himself that he owed something to the McCraes. They had treated him decently, like a white man. He was under a certain obligation, and here was a chance to return it many thousandfold. Also it would show the McCrae girl that he was no common employee, but a man of influence. He thought he had pull enough. Yes, when he came to think about it, it was a shame that people like the McCraes should lose everything. Nobody but the railway would buy their ranch, under the circumstances. But the railway could do so, and likely make a profit. That would be fair to everybody.

Once Farwell came to a conclusion he was prompt to act. He said, without preliminary:

"McCrae, what do you want for that ranch of yours?"

"It's not for sale now," McCrae replied.

"Everything's for sale at some price," Farwell commented. "What's a fair figure for it? I don't mean what you'll take — but what's it worth?"

McCrae considered.

"There's a thousand acres, and all good. There's no better land in the world. Then there's the buildings and fencing and stock and implements. Hard to say, nowadays. Why, raw land in little patches is selling at fancy figures. I should say as it stands — stocked and all — it's worth a hundred and fifty thousand of any man's money."

"If I can find a buyer at that figure will you take it?"

"No I'm not selling."

"Now, look here," said Farwell, "you say your place is worth one hundred and fifty thousand. That's with plenty of water for irrigation. Say it is. But what's it worth without water?"

"Without water," said McCrae slowly, "the land itself is worth about one dollar an acre. Twenty-five thousand would be an outside price for a crazy man to pay for Talapus."

"Exactly," said Farwell. "McCrae, you'd better let me try to find you a purchaser. For, if you hang on, just as sure as God made little red apples you'll be praying to Him to send you a crazy man."

McCrae was silent for a long minute, his eyes fixed on his horses' ears. "This is the first time," he said "that it's been put up to me straight. I knew, of course — we all knew — but nobody had the nerve to come here and tell us so."

"Well, I have the nerve," said Farwell. "But I'm not saying it the way you think I am. I'm not talking as an official; I'm talking as a friend — as I'd like a man to talk to me if I were in your fix. I'm trying to get you to stand from under. Here's the situation, as plainly as I can put it: If you can't get water you will be forced to sell, and the best you can get is grazing-land prices. You know that. On the other hand, if you will sell now I think I can get you

the price you named. Understand, I'm not doing this for a commission. I don't want one, and I wouldn't take one. I think the railway would buy on my recommendation if I put it strongly enough; and I'd do that for you people because — oh, well, just because I would. Now, there it is, McCrae, and it's up to you."

McCrae eased his team. His big shoulders seemed to droop, as if a heavy weight had been laid upon them. He fought his temptation in the darkness.

"No," he said at last, "I won't sell. But I'm obliged to you all the same. If the railway would buy us all out ——"

"No!" snapped Farwell. "So that's why you won't sell. You think your friends will hold out, too. You've got a sort of a pool. It won't do you any good. The rest of them haven't the sand. I'll bet there isn't another man who would turn down such an offer as I've made to you. It will be each man for himself pretty soon."

"You're wrong," said McCrae. "We'll stay with each other. Casey Dunne had an offer from York. He didn't take it."

"Dunne is a fool!" rasped Farwell. Never guarded in speech, his instinctive hostility flared into hot words. "He won't get the chance again. He's one man we *won't* buy."

"I'm another," McCrae retorted swiftly. "Look here, Mr. Farwell, I was in this country when its only

crop was buffalo hides and bad Indians. Land! — you couldn't give it away. I can show you a town with hotels and banks and paved streets and electric lights — a fine little town. Twenty-odd years ago I was offered the section that town now stands on, for a team and a two weeks' grubstake for a man and his wife. They wanted to get out, and they couldn't. I gave 'em the grub, and told 'em it was worth the price of it to me not to own the land. Yes, sir — and I meant it. I was that shortsighted. So were others. We thought the country would never fill up, just as we thought the buffalo would never be killed out, and we kept on drifting. When I woke up, the cheap lands were about gone. And then, ten years late, I made my grab for a piece of what was left. I hiked for this country that I knew ahead of everybody, and I picked out the best bunch of stuff there was in it, and I sat down to wait for the rush to catch up to me. Now it's caught me and the rest of us who came in early. And now you people tell me I've got to move off my reservation, and go away somewhere and begin again. I won't do it — I tell you I won't! And, what's more, don't you crowd me too hard — me and the rest of the boys — or there'll be hell a-popping right here. Now, you mind what I'm telling you."

He spoke deliberately, evenly, without raising his voice. His manner, even more than his words, expressed fixed determination. Farwell lifted his

eyebrows, and puckered his lips in a silent whistle. His diplomacy was turning out badly, and he repressed an inclination to retort.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said. "I hoped we could fix this up. Think it over, anyway."

"I've done my thinking."

"But, man, you're on the wrong side of the fence, and you know it. The railway is too strong for you. What's the sense of bucking it?"

"Not much, maybe. I guess you mean well, and I take it friendly, but this ain't a question of sense."

"Of what, then?"

"Of a man's right to keep what he's worked for, and to live on the land he owns." McCrae replied. "That's the way I look at it."

It was the old question once more — older than the country, older than the *Mayflower*, older than the Great Charter wrested from John the King —— the eternal battle between the common man and class or privilege. Here, in the new country, in place of the divine right of kings and the hereditary power of nobles, was substituted the might of money, the power of the corporate body, itself a creation of law, overriding the power which created it.

"Well, it's your funeral," said Farwell. "I can't help my job, just remember that. And of course I've got to earn my pay."

"Sure," said McCrae; "sure, I understand."

They were at the camp. Farwell jumped out

inviting McCrae to put his team up and come to his quarters. McCrae refused. It was late; he must be getting back.

"Just as you say," said Farwell. "I'm coming over to your ranch now and then, if you don't mind."

"Come along," said McCrae. "Latchstring's always out. You, Jeff; you, Dinny! G'lang, boys!"

The buckboard leaped to the sudden plunge of the little road team. Farwell stood for a moment listening to the diminishing drum roll of hoofs, whir of spokes, and clank of axles in their boxes.

"The blamed fool!" he thought. "Well, I gave him his chance. But it's going to be hard on his folks." He shook his head. "Yes, it will be pretty hard on his wife and the girl — what do they call her? Sheila. Nice name that — odd! Sheila!" He repeated the name aloud.

"Hello, did you speak to me?" said the voice of his assistant, Keeler, in the darkness.

"No!" snapped Farwell, with unnecessary curtness; "I didn't."

CHAPTER VIII

AT the end of a week Farwell told Keeler that he was going to ride over to Talapus. He added unnecessarily that he wanted to see how his horse was getting on. Whereat his assistant, who had very good ears, grinned internally, though outwardly he kept a decorous face. He did not expect his chief back till late.

But Farwell returned early, and spent a busy half hour in blowing up everybody from Keeler down. On this occasion he had not seen Sheila at all. She and Casey Dunne, so Mrs. McCrae informed him, were at the latter's ranch. Mr. Dunne, it appeared, was buying some house furnishings, and wanted Sheila's advice. Farwell took an abrupt departure, declining a hospitable invitation. He barely looked at the lame horse.

For another week he sulked in a poisonous temper. He was done with Talapus. He thought that McCrae girl had some sense, but if she was going traipsing all over the country with Dunne, why, that let him out. Maybe she was going to marry Dunne. It looked like it. Anyway, it was none

of his business. But the end of it was that he went to Talapus again.

This time he found Sheila alone. The elder McCraes were gone to Coldstream in the buckboard. Young Alec was somewhere on the ditch. Sheila, flanked by clothesbasket and workbasket, sat on the veranda mending his shirts. The occupation was thoroughly unromantic, little calculated to appeal to the imagination. Nevertheless, it appealed to Farwell.

Largely because it is the perverse nature of man to believe that the Fates have set him in the wrong groove, Farwell, like many others whose lives have been spent in exclusively masculine surroundings, believed his tastes to be domestic. Not that he had ever pushed this belief beyond the theoretical stage; nor would he have exchanged places with any of his confrères who had taken wives. But he railed inwardly at the intense masculinity of his life, for the same reason that the sailorman curses the sea and the plainsman the plains. Just as the tragedian is certain in his inmost soul that his proper rôle is light comedy, while the popular comedian is equally positive that he should be starring in the legitimate; so Farwell, harsh, dominant, impatient, brutal on occasion, a typical lone male of his species, knowing little of and caring less for the softer side of life, cherished a firm belief that his proper place was the exact centre of a family circle.

Although he had never seen a home that he cared beans about — including the one of his childhood — the singing of "Home, Sweet Home" invariably left him pensive for half an hour. Theoretically — heretofore always strictly theoretically — he possessed a strong *dulce domum* impulse. And so the spectacle of Sheila mending her brother's shirts was one of which he thoroughly approved. It gave him a feeling of intimacy, as though he had been admitted to the performance of a domestic rite.

Sheila picked up a second shirt, inspected it critically, and frowned. "Now, isn't that a wreck?" she observed. "Sandy's awfully hard on his shirts." She nipped a thread recklessly between her teeth, shot the end deftly through the needle's eye, and sighed. "Oh, well, I suppose I must just do the best I can with the thing."

"Your brother is lucky," said Farwell. "My things get thrown away. No one to look after them when they begin to go."

"That's very wasteful," she reproved him. "Why don't you send them somewhere?"

"Where, for instance?"

"Oh, anywhere. I don't know. There must be women in every town who would like to earn a little money."

"Well, I haven't time to hunt for them. If you know any one around here who would undertake

the job, I could give her quite a bit of work. So could the others."

"You don't mean me, do you?" laughed Sheila. "Sandy gives me all I can handle."

"Of course I never thought of such a thing," said Farwell seriously. "Did it sound like that?"

"No, I am joking. I think you take things seriously, Mr. Farwell."

"I suppose so," he admitted. "Yes, I guess I do. I can't help it. I'm no joker; no time for that. Jokers don't get anywhere. Never saw one that did. It's the fellow who keeps thinking about his job and banging away at it who gets there."

"The inference being that I won't get anywhere."

Farwell, puzzled momentarily, endeavoured to remember what he had said.

"I guess I made another break. I wasn't thinking of you. Women don't have to get anywhere. Men do — that is, men who count. I've seen a lot of fellows in my own profession — smart, clever chaps — but, instead of buckling down to work, they were eternally running about having a good time. And what did any of them ever amount to? Not that!" He snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"But wasn't that the fault of the men themselves? I mean that, apart from their liking for a good time, perhaps they hadn't the other qualities to make them successful."

"Yes, they had," said Farwell positively. "Didn't I say they were clever? It wasn't lack of that — it was their confounded fooling around. Almost every man gets one chance to make good. If he's ready for it when it comes, he's made. If he isn't — well, he isn't. That was the way with these fellows. When they should have been digging into the groundwork of their profession they weren't. And so, when good things were given them, they fell down hard. They lost money for other people, and that doesn't do. Now they're down and out — lucky to get a job with a level and one rodman to boss. There's no sympathy coming to them. It was their own fault."

He spoke positively, with finality, beating the heel of his clenched fist against his knee to emphasize his words. Evidently he spoke out of the faith that was in him. Not a line of his face suggested humour or whimsicality. Not a twinkle of the eye relieved its hardness. He was grave, dour, purposeful, matter-of-fact. He took himself, his life, and the things of life with exceeding seriousness.

Sheila regarded him thoughtfully. Somehow she was reminded of her father. There was the same gravity, marching hand in hand with tenacity of purpose, fixity of ideas; the same grim scorn of the tonic wine of jest and laughter. But in the elder man these were mellowed and softened. In Farwell, in the strength of his prime, they were in full tide, accentuated.

"Every man should have a good chance, and be ready for it," she replied; "but some men never get it."

"Yes, they do; yes, they do," he asseverated. "They get it, all right. Only some of them don't know it when it comes; and others are ashamed to own up that they've missed it. We all get it, I tell you, sooner or later."

"It may come too late to some."

"No, no, it comes in time if a man is wide awake. It's about the only square deal creation gives him. And it's about all creation owes him. It's right up to them then. If he's asleep, it's his own fault. I don't say it doesn't happen more than once; but it does happen once."

Plainly he was in deep earnest. He had no tolerance of failure, no excuse for it. According to his theory, every man at some time was master of his fate.

"Have you had your chance?" she asked.

"Not the big chance that I want. I've done some good work, here and there. But the big thing is coming to me. I feel it. And I'm in shape to handle it, too. When I do that, I'll quit working for other people. I'll work for myself. Yes, by George! they can come to me."

Sheila laughed at him. His absolute cocksureness was too ridiculous. But in spite of herself she was impressed by the sincerity of his belief in himself.

And she realized that opportunity was apt to knock at the door of a man who believed in his own capacity for success and let others know it.

"I probably make you tired," said Farwell. "You asked me, and I told you. I'm not worrying about *my* future. Now, let's talk about yours. You were away when I was here last week."

"Yes, I was over at Chakchak."

"That's Dunne's ranch. Your mother said you were helping him choose some things from a mail-order catalogue."

"Furniture, linen, dishes, and a lot of other things." There was no embarrassment in her tone.

"Oh!" said Farwell; and as he uttered the word it resembled a growl. "Well, when is it to be?"

"When is what to be?"

"Why, the wedding, of course."

"What wedding?" She laid down her work and stared at him. Then she laughed, though the colour surged to her cheeks. "Oh, I see. You think I was choosing these things for Mr. Dunne's prospective bride?"

"Of course."

"Not a bit of course — unless Casey has deceived me shamefully. Can't a man furnish his house better without having a wedding in view?"

"He can, but usually he doesn't. That's my experience."

"I wasn't aware that you were married."

"Married?" cried Farwell. "Me? I'm not. I'm glad of it. I have enough to worry me now. I ——" He came to an abrupt stop. "Oh, well, laugh away," he added. "I'll tell you what I thought. I thought you were going to marry Dunne."

Sheila's laughter closed suddenly. "You haven't the least right to think that or say it," she said coldly. "It's strange if I can't help a friend choose a few house furnishings without impertinent comment."

"Oh, come!" said Farwell. "I didn't mean to be impertinent, Miss McCrae. I know I'm too outspoken. I'm always putting my foot in it."

"Very well," said Sheila. "I think you said you wanted to speak to me of my future?"

"Yes. I spoke to your father about selling the ranch. He refused point-blank. What can we do about it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "'We?' If he told you he won't sell, he won't. I didn't know you had spoken to him."

"Couldn't you persuade him?"

"I wouldn't try. I don't want Talapus sold. What right have you to hold us up? That's what it amounts to."

"There's a woman for you!" cried Farwell to the world at large. "Hold you up? Great Scott, that's just what I'm not doing! I offered him the

value he put on the ranch himself, not a holdup price. I mean I offered to get it for him. I want you to put it up to him, and get your mother to help you. You ought to have some say in this. He ought to think of you a little."

"It's his ranch," Sheila returned loyally. "He knows what he's doing. When a man has made up his mind, women shouldn't make things harder for him by whining."

"That's right enough, too," said Farwell, whose masculinity was in thorough accord with the last sentiment. "But he is just the same as throwing away a hundred thousand dollars. I don't want to see it. I know what he's up against. I want him to get out while he can break even."

"What about the rest of the ranchers?"

"I don't care a hang for the rest of the ranchers."

"And why do you make a distinction in our favour?"

Farwell was not prepared with an answer, even to himself. Her bluntness was disconcerting. "I don't know," he replied. "It doesn't matter. The main thing is to make your father get out of the way of the tree, for it's going to fall right where he's standing. He can't dodge once it starts. And what hits him hits you."

"Then I won't dodge, either," she declared bravely. "He's right not to sell. I wouldn't if I were in his place."

Farwell slid back in his chair and bit his cigar savagely.

"I never saw such a family!" he exclaimed. "You've got nerve a-plenty, but mighty poor judgment. Get it clear now, what's going to happen. You'll have enough water for domestic purposes and stock, but none for the ranch. Then it won't be worth a dollar an acre. Same way with the rest. And now let me tell you another thing: Just as soon as the water is turned off, every rancher will fall all over himself to sell. That's what your father doesn't believe. He'll see when it's too late. It's rank folly."

"It's our own folly, Mr. Farwell!"

"You mean it's none of my business. Well, I make it my business. I butt in on this. I'll put it right up to him. I'll shove the money right under his nose. If he turns it down I'm done. I'll quit. And if you don't do your best to make him take it, you won't be dealing fairly with him, your mother, or yourself."

Sheila stared at him, quite unused to such a tone. He, an utter stranger, was arrogating to himself the position of friend to the family, presuming to criticise her father's wisdom, to tell her what she should do and should not do. But withal she was impressed by his earnestness. His advice, she could not believe, was entirely disinterested. At the same time, inconsistently, she was angry.

"Well," she said. "I must say you *are* 'butting in.' You — you — oh, you don't lack nerve, Mr. Farwell!"

"Don't worry about my nerve," he retorted grimly. "You'll have other troubles. For Heaven's sake have some sense. Will you do as I tell you, or wont you?" He leaned forward, tapping the arm of her chair with tense fingers.

"No," she answered positively, "I won't."

Young McCrae came around the corner of the house. He was hatless, coatless, muddy from his work in the ditches. A pair of faded blue overalls were belted to his lean middle by a buckskin thong, and his feet were incased in wet moccasins. He came noiselessly but swiftly, not of purpose, but from habit, with a soft, springy step; and he was level with them before they were aware of him. He came to an abrupt halt, his eyes on Farwell, every muscle tensing. For an instant he resembled a young tiger about to spring.

"Oh, Sandy," cried his sister, "what a mess! For goodness sake don't come up here with those muddy moccasins."

"Just as you say," drawled young McCrae. "I thought you might want me. Anything I can do for you, sis? Want anything carried in — or *thrown out?*" He accented the last words.

Farwell, who had read danger signals in men's eyes before, saw the flare of enmity in the young

man's, and raised his shoulders in a faint shrug. He smiled to himself in amusement.

"No, there's nothing, thanks," said Sheila, quite unconscious of the hidden meaning of his words. "Better get cleaned up for supper."

McCrae swung on silently, with his rapid, noiseless step. Farwell turned to Sheila.

"Do this for me, Miss McCrae," he pleaded. "Give me a fair chance with your father if you won't help me with him. Don't tell your brother of what I'm trying to do. If you do that, his influence will be the other way."

"If my father has made up his mind, none of us can change it," said Sheila. "But I'll give you a fair field. I won't tell Sandy."

Farwell, in spite of previous virtuous resolutions, remained for supper. The elder McCraes had not returned. The young people had the meal to themselves; and Sheila and Farwell had the conversation to themselves, for Sandy paid strict and confined attention to his food, and did not utter half a dozen words. Immediately afterward he vanished; but, when Farwell went to the stable for his horse, he found the young man saddling a rangy, speedy-looking black.

"Guess I'll ride with you a piece," he announced.

"All right," Farwell replied carelessly. He did not desire company; but if it was forced on him he could not help it.

The light was failing as they rode from the ranch house. The green fields lay sombre in the creeping dusk. Nighthawks in search of food darted in erratic flight, uttering their peculiar booming notes. Running water murmured coolly in the ditch that flanked the road. Cattle, full of repletion, stood in contented lethargy by the watering place, ruminating, switching listlessly at the evening flies which scarcely annoyed them. The vivid opalescent lights of the western sky grew fainter, faded. Simultaneously the zenith shaded from turquoise to sapphire. In the northeast, low over the plains, gleaming silver against the dark velvet background of the heavens, lay the first star.

But Farwell paid no attention to these things. Instead, he was thinking of Sheila McCrae — reconstructing her pose as she bade him good-bye, the direct, level gaze of her dark eyes, the contour of her face, the cloudy masses of her brown hair. He was unconsciously engaged in the perilous, artistic work of drawing for his sole and exclusive use a mental "portrait of a lady"; and, after the manner of man attracted by woman, he idealized the picture of his creation. By virtue of this absorbing occupation, he quite forgot the presence of the brother of the woman. But a mile beyond the ranch young McCrae pulled up.

"I turn off here," he said.

"That so? Good night," said Farwell.

"There's something I came to tell you," McCrae pursued. "I'm not making any grand-stand play about it; but you'd better be a lot more careful when you're talking to my sister. Understand?"

"No, I don't," said Farwell. "I never said anything to Miss McCrae that her father and mother mightn't hear."

"Oh, *that!*" said young Sandy, and spat in disgust. "No, I guess you didn't — and you hadn't better. But you told her to do something — fairly ordered her. I heard you, and I heard her tell you she wouldn't. Perhaps you'll tell me what it was?"

"Perhaps I won't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to, mostly," said Farwell impatiently. "Also because it's none of your business. Your sister and I understand each other. Our conversation didn't concern you — directly, anyway."

"I'll let it go at that on your say-so," Sandy returned, with surprising calmness. "I'm not crowding trouble with you, but get this clear: You know why you're hanging around the ranch, and I don't. All the same, if you are up to any monkey business, you'll settle it with me."

Farwell's temper, never reliable, rose at once.

"Quite a Wild West kid, aren't you?" he observed, with sarcasm. "You make me tired. It's a good

thing for you your people are decent." He crowded his horse close to the other. "Now, look here, young fellow, I won't stand for any fool boy's talk. You're old enough to know better. Cut it out with me after this, do you hear?"

"Where are you coming with that cayuse?" demanded young McCrae, and suddenly raked a rowelled heel behind the animal's shoulder.

Ensued five strenuous minutes for Farwell, wherein he sought to soothe his mount's wounded feelings. When at last the quadruped condescended to allow his four hoofs to remain on the ground simultaneously for more than a fraction of a second, young McCrae was gone; and Farwell, somewhat shaken, and profane with what breath was left him, had nothing for it but to resume his homeward way.

CHAPTER IX

THE astute Mr. Sleeman's prediction to Farwell — namely, that the attitude of the ranchers would affect land sales — proved correct. Naturally, owing to a perfect advertising machinery, a number of sales were made to people at distant points, who bought for speculation merely. But these, though well enough in their way, were not entirely satisfactory. The company needed actual settlers — men who would go upon the lands and improve them — to furnish object lessons from the ground itself to personally conducted, prospective buyers, who in turn should do the same, and ultimately provide the Prairie Southern branch of Western Airline with a paying traffic in freight and humanity.

But prospective buyers proved annoyingly inquisitive. After looking at the company's holdings, they naturally wished to see for themselves what the country was good for; and the obvious way to find out was to visit the established ranches.

Sleeman could not prevent it — nor appear to wish to prevent it. In fact, he had to acquiesce cheerfully and take them himself. That was better

than letting them go alone. But the very air seemed to carry rumours. In vain he assured them that there was no fear of trouble, that in any event the company would protect them; in vain he showed them the big canal and beautiful system of ditches, and pointed with much enthusiasm to the armour-belted, double-riveted clause in the sale contracts, guaranteeing to the lucky buyer the delivery of so many miner's inches or cubic feet of water every day in the year.

"It's like this," said one prospective buyer: "They ain't enough water for the whole country, and you're certainly aimin' to cinch some of the men that's here already so tight they can't breathe. If I buy water they're gettin' now, they're mighty apt to be sore on me. Dunno's I blame them, either. I like to stand well with my neighbours. Your land's all right, but I can't see where we deal."

And the attitude of this individual was fairly representative. Landlookers came, saw; but, instead of remaining to conquer the soil, the majority of them went elsewhere.

This was hard on Sleeman. He was a good salesman, and he had a good proposition; but he was handicapped by conditions not of his creating and beyond his control. And he knew quite well that, while a corporation may not give an employee any credit whatever for satisfactory results, it invariably

saddles him with the discredit of unsatisfactory ones.

He foresaw that sooner or later — and very probably sooner — he would be asked to explain why he was not making sales. And he came to the conclusion that, as something was sure to start, he might as well start it himself.

His cogitations crystallized in the form of a letter to his chief, the head of the land department, wherein he told the bald and shining truth without even a mental reservation. And he intimated tactfully that if the department had another man whom they considered better fitted to deal with the unfortunate local conditions, he, Sleeman, would be charmed to assist him, or to go elsewhere in their service, if that seemed best to their aggregate wisdom. He worded his part of this letter very carefully, for he had seen as good men as himself incontinently fired merely because they could not deny themselves the luxury of a petulant phrase.

His letter bore fruit; for Carrol, the mighty head of the land department, came down to see things for himself.

Carrol, however, suffered from a species of myopia not uncommon among gentlemen who have for a long time represented large interests. He had so come to look upon Western Airline as an irresistible force, that the concept of an immovable body was quite beyond him. He had nothing but contempt for any

person or set of persons — corporations with equal capital always excepted — rash enough to oppose any of its plans.

"Now, see here," he said at a conference with Sleeman and Farwell. "We can't afford to have our sales blocked this way. Our ditches will carry water now, and the dam itself is nearly completed. Open up the ditches and take all the water you can. Then we'll see whether there is anything in these yarns."

"But if we take water before we need it, we simply stiffen their hand," Sleeman objected. "We give them legitimate grounds to kick."

"They'll kick, anyway," said Carrol. "We need water to grow grass — if anybody should ask you. The sooner we take it the sooner we shall be able to acquire these ranches. Once the men see what they're up against they'll ask us to buy, which we'll do on our own terms. That's the programme. What do you think, Farwell?"

"You're the doctor," Farwell replied.

"You don't anticipate any trouble?"

"Not a bit," said Farwell contemptuously. "They'll howl, of course. Let 'em. In a month they'll eat out of your hand."

"Quite so," said Carrol; "that's how I look at it."

"There's one man, though," said Farwell, "whom I'd like to see get a fair price. That's McCrae, who owns Talapus Ranch. It's the biggest and best in the country."

"Will he sell now?"

"He might."

"What has he got, and what does he want for it?" Farwell told him.

"What is it worth, Sleeman?" And at his agent's appraisal, Carrol looked shocked and grieved. "Why, good Lord! Farwell," he said, "he wants almost what his ranch is worth."

"Funny that he should, isn't it?" sneered Farwell, who stood in no awe of Carrol. "Well, and that's what I want him to get."

"Can't do it," said Carrol decisively. "No money in it. Show me how I could make a profit."

"Cut it up into little chunks and sell it to those marks back East," Farwell replied. "I don't have to tell you your business. Make another Sentinel of it if you like."

The reference was to the town site of Sentinel, a half section of prairie which had been bought for three thousand dollars and sold as town lots on paper at a couple of hundred thousand to confiding, distant investors. It was still prairie, and apt to remain so. Carrol had engineered the deal, and he would have blushed if he had not forgotten how. As it was, he smiled sourly.

"I wish I could. Is this McCrae a friend of yours?"

"Put it that way," Farwell replied, frowning at the quizzical expression of Sleeman's eye. "He doesn't want to sell, but I want him to have the chance of

refusing real money. He may take it, or he may not. Anyway, I make it as a personal request."

Carrol eyed him for a moment. He knew Farwell's reputation for uncompromising hostility to any one who thwarted his plans, accidentally or otherwise. Also Farwell was a good man. He was bound to rise. Some day, he, Carrol, might require his help and he kept a sharp eye on possibilities of that nature. So he said:

"It isn't business, but to oblige *you*, Farwell — all right, I'll take the chance that he won't accept. But it's sudden death, mind. No dickering. He accepts, or he doesn't. If not, he'll get just dry-belt prices with the rest when they surrender."

And so a few days afterward Farwell, armed with a check representing one hundred and fifty thousand dollars of lawful money, procured because he considered it likely to have a good moral effect, sought Talapus Ranch and Donald McCrae. And McCrae, as he feared, turned the offer down.

Farwell had calculated on producing the check at the proper psychological moment, in practically stampeding him. The trouble was that the psychological moment failed to arrive. McCrae showed no symptoms of vacillation. The issue was never in doubt.

"I told you before," he said, "I don't want to sell, and I won't sell."

"It's a hundred and fifty thousand cold cash —

your own value," urged Farwell. "At 6 per cent. it's nine thousand a year from now to eternity for you and your wife and children. If you refuse, the best you can hope for is dry-land prices. It's your only salvation, I tell you."

"My word is passed," said McCrae. "Even if it wasn't, I wouldn't be harried off the little bit of earth that's mine. It's good of you to take this trouble —I judge you had trouble—but it's not a bit of use."

"Look here," said Farwell. "Will you talk it over with your family — your wife and daughter particularly? It's due to them."

"I will not," McCrae refused, with patriarchal scorn. "*I* am the family. I speak for all."

"The old mule!" thought Farwell. Aloud he said: "I want to tell you that in a few days you'll lose half your water. The rest will go when the dam is finished. This is final — the last offer, your last chance. I've done every blessed thing I could for you. Right now is when you make or break yourself and your wife and children."

"That's my affair," said McCrae. "I tell you no, and no." He plucked the oblong paper from Farwell's unresisting fingers. "A lot of money, aren't you?" he apostrophized it. "More than I've ever seen before, or will see again, like enough." Suddenly he tore the check in half, and again and again, cast the fragments in the air, and blew through them. "And there goes your check, Mr. Farwell!"

"And there goes your ranch with it," Farwell commented bitterly. "One is worth just about as much as the other now."

"I'm not so sure about that," said McCrae.

"I'm sure enough for both of us," Farwell responded.

With a perfunctory good-bye, he swung into the saddle, leaving McCrae, a sombre figure, leaning against the slip bars of the corral. He had anticipated this outcome; but, nevertheless, he was disappointed, vaguely apprehensive. In vain he told himself that it was nothing to him. The sense of failure persisted. Once he half turned in his saddle, looking backward, and he caught, or fancied he caught, the flutter of white against the shade of the veranda of the distant ranch house. That must be Sheila McCrae.

For the first time he realized that his concern was for her alone, that he did not care a hoot for the rest of the family. All this bother he had been to, all his efforts with old McCrae, his practical holdup of Carrol, even — he owned it to himself frankly — his failure to push the construction work as fast as he might had been for her and because of her. And what was the answer?

"Surely," said Farwell, straightening himself in the saddle, "surely to blazes I'm not getting fond of the girl!"

As became a decent, respectable, contented bach-

elor, he shied from the idea. It was absolutely ridiculous, unheard-of. The girl was all right, sensible, good-looking. She suited him as well as any woman he had ever met; but that, after all, was not saying much. He liked her — he made that concession candidly — but as for anything more — nothing to it!

But the idea, once born, refused to be disposed of thus summarily; it persisted. He found himself recalling trivial things, all pertaining to Sheila — tricks of manner, of speech, intonations, movements of the hands, body, and lips — these avalanched themselves upon him, swamping connected, reasonable thought.

"What cursed nonsense!" said Farwell angrily to himself. "I don't care a hang about her, of course. I'm dead sure she doesn't care for me. Anyway, I don't want to get married — yet. I'm not in shape to marry. Why, what the devil would *I* do with a wife? Where'd I put her?"

A wife! Huh! Instantly he was a prey to misgivings. He recalled shudderingly brother engineers whose wives dragged about with them, living on the edge of construction camps under canvas in summer, in rough-boarded, tar-papered shacks in the winter; or perhaps in half-furnished cottages in some nearby jerk-water town.

He had pitied the men, fought shy of the women. Most of them had put the best face upon their lives,

rejoicing in the occasional streaks of fat, eating the lean uncomplainingly. They led a migratory existence, moved arbitrarily, like pawns, at the will of eminent and elderly gentlemen a thousand or so miles away, whom they did not know and who did not know them. Continually, as their temporary habitations began to take on the semblance of homes, they were transferred, from mountains to plains, from the far north to the tropics. Their few household gods bore the scars of many movings — by rail, by steamer, by freight wagon, and even by pack train.

And there were those whose responsibilities forced them to abandon life at the front. These set up establishments in the new, cheap residential districts of cities. There the wives kept camp; thither, at long intervals, the husbands took journeys ranging from hundreds of miles to thousands. True, there were those who had attained eminence. These lived properly in well-appointed houses in eligible localities; and their subordinates kept the work in hand during their frequent home-goings. But the ruck — the rank and file — had to take such marital happiness as came their way on the quick-lunch system.

Now Farwell was a bachelor, rooted and confirmed. He had always shunned married men's quarters. When his day's work was done, he foregathered with other lone males, talking shop half the night in a blue haze of tobacco around a red-hot stove or

stretched in comfortable undress in front of a tent. This was his life as he had lived it for years; as he had hoped to live it until he attained fame and became a consulting engineer, a man who passed on the work of other men.

His theory of his own capacity for domesticity, though sincere, was strictly academic. He had no more idea of putting it into practice than he had of proving in his own person, before his proper time, the doctrine of eternal life.

Now, into the familiar sum of existence, which he knew from divisor to quotient, was suddenly shot a new factor — a woman. He experienced a new sensation, vague, unaccountable, restless, like the first uneasy throbs that precede a toothache. He lit a cigar; but, though he drew in the smoke hungrily, it did not satisfy. He felt a vacancy, a want, a longing.

He became aware of a dust cloud approaching. Ahead of it loped a big, clean-limbed buckskin. In the straight, wiry figure in the saddle he recognized Casey Dunne. Dunne pulled up and nodded.

"Fine day, Mr. Farwell."

"Yes," said Farwell briefly.

"Work coming on all right?"

"Yes."

"That's good," Dunne commented, with every appearance of lively satisfaction. "Been to Talapus? See anything of Miss McCrae there?"

"She's at home, I believe," said Farwell stiffly.

"Thanks. Come around and see me some time. Morning." He lifted the buckskin into a lope again.

Farwell looking after him, experienced a second new sensation — jealousy.

CHAPTER X

CASEY DUNNE, busily engaged in strengthening a working harness with rivets, looked up as a shadow fell across the morning sunlight. The shadow belonged to Tom McHale.

McHale, like Dunne himself, had seen rough times. Older than his employer, he had wandered up and down the West in the good old days of cheap land and no barbed wire, engaged in the congenial, youthful occupation of seeing as much country as he could. In the process, he had turned his hand to almost everything which had fresh air as a collateral, from riding for a cattle outfit to killing meat for railway camps. He and Dunne had come into the Coldstream country at nearly the same time; but Dunne had some money and McHale none at all. Dunne bought land and hired McHale. They worked side by side to make the ranch. McHale bought forty acres from Dunne and worked out the price, bought more, and was still working it out. But apart from financial matters they were fast friends, and either would have trusted the other with anything he possessed.

"Say," said McHale, "there's something wrong. Our ditches ain't runnin' more'n half full."

Casey put down the hammer. "Maybe the ditch is plugged somewhere."

"She may be, but it ain't likely. I've followed her quite a piece. So I come to get me a cayuse to go the rest of the way."

"I'll go with you," said Casey, throwing the harness on a peg.

In five minutes they were loping easily along the ditch, with sharp eyes for possible obstructions. As McHale had said, it was running not half full, and seemed to be falling. The strong, deep, gurgling note of a full head of water was gone. Instead was a mere babble.

So far as they could see, the flow was unhindered by obstacles; there was no break in the banks. Even around the treacherous sidehill there was no more than the usual seepage. And so at last they rode down to the Coldstream itself, to the intake of the ditch, a rude wing dam of logs, brush, and sand bags, which, nevertheless, had served them excellently heretofore.

"I'm an Injun," McHale, ejaculated, "if the whole durn creek ain't lowered!" Because he came from a land of real rivers, he invariably referred to the Coldstream thus slightingly.

But unmistakably it had fallen. Half the dam appeared above the surface, slimy, weed-grown,

darkly water-soaked. Naturally, with the falling of the water, the ditch had partially failed.

The two men looked at each other. The same thought was present in the mind of each. It was barely possible that a land or rock slide somewhere high upstream had dammed or diverted the current; but it was most improbable. The cause was nearer to seek, the agency extremely human.

McHale bit into fresh consolation and spat in the direction of the inadequate dam.

"I reckon they've started in on us," he observed.

"Looks like it," Casey agreed.

"We need water now the worst way. I was figurin' on shootin' a big head on to the clover, and after that on to the oats. They sure need it. What's runnin' now ain't no use to us. We got to have more."

"No doubt about that, Tom," said Casey. "We'll ride up to their infernal dam and see just what's doing."

"Good enough!" cried McHale, his eyes lighting up. "But say, Casey, them ditch-and-dam boys ain't no meek-and-lowly outfit. Some of 'em is plumb hard-faced. How'd it be if I scattered back to the ranch first. I ain't packed a gun steady since I got to be a hayseed, but ——"

"What do you want of a gun? We're just going to look at things and have a talk with Farwell."

"You never know when you'll need a gun,"

McHale asserted, as an incontrovertible general proposition.

"You won't need it this time. Come along."

It was almost midday when they came in sight of the construction camp beside the dam. To their surprise, a barbed wire fence had been thrown around it, enclosing an area of some twenty acres. On the trail, a space had been left for a gate, but it had not yet been hung. Beside it stood a post bearing a notice board, and, sitting with his back against the post, a man rested, smoking. As they came up, he rose and sauntered into the trail between the gate-posts.

"Hey you, hold on there!" he said.

Dunne and McHale pulled up.

"Look a-here, friend," said the latter, "do you think you're one of them never-sag gates, or a mountain, or what? You want to see a doctor about them delusions. They'll sure get you into trouble some day."

"That'll be all right about me," the big guardian of the gate returned. "Just read that notice. This is private property."

They read it. It was of the "no-admittance" variety, and forbade entrance to all individuals not in the company's employ.

"We've got business here, and we're going in," said Casey, and began to walk his horse forward.

The man caught the bridle with one hand. The other he thrust into his pocket.

"You get back now," he ordered, "or you'll walk home."

Dunne stopped instantly. His companion's hand made one lightninglike motion, and perforce came up empty.

"And this," said Mr. McHale mournfully — "this was the time I didn't need a gun!"

"Well, you don't need it, do you?" said Casey. "Observe, the gentleman still keeps his sawed-off yeggman's delight in his pocket. Pull it, friend, pull it! Don't scorch the cloth by pressing the trigger where it is. Steady, Shiner, while the gentleman shoots you!"

The guardian smiled sardonically. "Amuse yourselves, boys, but don't crowd in on me."

"Just as you say," replied Casey. "By the way, you needn't tire your arm holding my horse. He'll stand. Besides, I don't like it."

The man released the bridle and stepped back. "Make this easy for me, boys, I don't want trouble, but I got my instructions."

"Now, you listen here," said McHale. "Lemme tell you something: It's just hell's tender mercy on you I ain't got a gun. If I'd 'a' had it, you'd been beef by the trail right now."

"There's always two chances to be the beef," the other returned, unmoved. "Go fill your hand before you talk to me."

McHale grinned at him. "I like you better than

I did, partner. Next time you won't have no kick on what I hold."

"We want to see Farwell," said Casey.

"Why couldn't you say that before?" the guardian returned. "I'll take a chance on you. Go in."

They found Farwell at his quarters before a table covered with prints and tracings.

"What can I do for you?" he asked curtly.

"My ditch has gone half dry," Casey replied. "I observe, too, that the river is lower than usual; which, of course, accounts for the ditch. It occurred to me that perhaps you might account for the river."

"We have begun to take water for our lands," Farwell told him. "Possibly that has something to do with it."

"I shouldn't wonder," Casey agreed dryly. "Why are you taking water now?"

"That," said Farwell deliberately, "is entirely our own affair."

"It affects us. You can't possibly use the water, because your lands are not cultivated."

"The water benefits the land," Farwell rejoined coldly. "It shows intending purchasers that we are actually delivering a sufficient quantity of water. Our use of it is legitimate."

"It's a low-down, *cultus* trick, if you ask me!" McHale interjected forcefully.

"I didn't ask you," snapped Farwell; "but I'll tell

you what I'll do. You make another remark like that, and I'll fire you out through that door."

McHale ignored Casey's significant glance.

"That door there?" he asked innocently. "That big, wide door leadin' right outside into all that fresh air? You don't mean that one?"

"That's the one," Farwell returned angrily.

"Well, well, well!" said McHale, in mock wonder. "You don't say? And it looks just like a common, ordinary door, too. Do you reckon you got time right now to show me how it works?"

"Quit it, Tom," said Casey. "Farwell, I want to get right down to case cards. This is a raw deal. I ask you not to take water that you can't use."

"Not to mince matters with you, Dunne," Farwell returned, "I may as well say that we intend to take as much as we like and when we like. There's plenty of water left in the river. It's merely a question of building your dams to catch it."

"Will you say that there will be plenty when your big dam is finished?"

Farwell lifted his big shoulders in a shrug which coupled utter indifference with an implication that the future was in the hands of Providence.

"Good Lord, Dunne, there's no use talking about that!" said he. "We will take what water we want. You get what is left. Is that plain?"

"Yes," said Casey quietly. "I won't bother you any more."

"But I will," said McHale. "I'll just bother you to make good that bluff of yours about firin' me out of here. Why, you durn, low-flung ——"

"Quit it!" Casey interrupted. "Stay where you are, Farwell, I'm not going to have a scrap. Tom, you come with me."

"Oh, well, just as you say, Casey," grumbled McHale. "I ain't hostile, special. Only I don't want him to run no blazers on me. He ——"

But Casey got him outside and administered a vitriolic lecture that had some effect.

"I'm sorry, Casey," McHale acknowledged, contritely. "I s'pose I ought to known better. But that gent with the gun and Farwell between them got me goin'. Honest, I never hunted trouble in my life. It just naturally tracks up on me when I'm lyin' all quiet in camp. Course, it has to be took care of when it comes."

"There'll be enough to keep you busy," said Casey grimly. And apparently in instant fulfilment of the prophecy came the short, decisive bark of a six-shooter. By the sound, the shot had been fired outside the camp, in the direction of the gate.

"It's that cuss that held us up!" snarled McHale, and swore viciously.

Both men went up into their saddles as if catapulted from the earth. McHale yelled as he hit the leather — a wild, ear-splitting screech, the old trouble cry of his kind in days gone by — and both

horses leaped frantically into motion, accomplishing the feat peculiar to cow and polo ponies of attaining their maximum speed in three jumps. They surged around the medley of tents and shacks, and came into the open neck and neck, running like singed cats.

A few hundred yards away, where the new sign-board stood beside the trail a horse struggled to rise, heaved its fore quarters up, and crashed down again, kicking in agony, raising a cloud of dust. Facing it, bending slightly forward, stood a man, holding a gun in his right hand.

Suddenly out of the dust cloud staggered a second, who rushed at the first, head down, extended fingers wildly clutching, and as he came he bellowed hoarsely the wild-bull cry of the fighting male, crazed with pain or anger. The gun in the hand of the first man flashed up and cut down; and, as it hung for an instant at the level, the report rapped through the still air. But the other, apparently unhurt, charged into him, and both went down together.

"It's big Oscar!" cried McHale. "That feller downed his horse. Holy catamounts! Look at them mix it! And here's the whole camp a-boilin' after us! Casey, did I hear you say this was the day I didn't need a gun?"

Before they could pull up they almost ran over the fighting men. The two were locked in ferocious grips. The big guardian of the gate was fighting for his life, silently, with clenched teeth, every cord and

muscle and vein standing out with the heartbreaking strain put upon them.

For the big Swede was the stronger man. Ordinarily mild and sweet-tempered, he was now a wild beast. Foam blew from his mouth and flecked his soft, golden beard, and he rumbled and snarled, beast-like, in his throat. He made no attempt to strike or to avoid the blows which beat against his face; but with one arm around his enemy's neck, the hand gripping the nearer side of the jaw, and the other hand pushing at it, he strove to break his neck. Little by little he twisted it. Gradually the chin pointed to the shoulder, almost past it. It seemed that with the fraction of an inch more the vertebral column must crack like a stick of candy. But the hand on the jaw slipped, and the chin, released, shot back again, to be tucked desperately down against the breastbone.

"Get in here and pull Oscar off!" cried Casey as he leaped from his horse.

"Not in a thousand years," McHale responded. "He can kill him. Let him do it. Serve the cuss right."

"You cursed fool!" snarled Casey. "That gang will be here in half a holy minute. They'll pound Oscar to death if he's fighting then. Here, you crazy Swede, let go! Let go, I say! It's me — Casey Dunne!"

But Oscar was past reason. Once more he had got the palm of his hand beneath that stubborn chin

and was lifting it from its shelter. As he put forth his huge strength, he roared out a torrent of Scandinavian oaths, interspersed with the more hardy varieties of Anglo-Saxon epithets.

"Catch hold of him," Casey ordered. "Jam your arm into his windpipe while I break his grip." As he spoke, he kicked the big Swede sharply on the left biceps. For an instant that mighty arm was paralyzed. Casey grasped his wrists and dragged them loose, while McHale, his forearm across the huge, bull-like throat, heaved back.

Oscar came apart from his victim slowly and reluctantly, as a deeply rooted stump yields to the pull of a purchase.

"He kel my Olga! He kel my Olga!" he vociferated. "He shoot her yust like she ban von vulf! By the yumpin' Yudas, you let me go!"

"Keep quiet, keep quiet, I tell you!" cried Casey. "You can get him later. See this bunch coming? They'll kill you with their shovels in half a minute."

The rush of men was almost upon them. They carried the tools which were in their hands the moment the shots were fired — mixing shovels, hoes, axes, pinch bars, and odd bits of wood and iron caught up on the impulse of the instant. Behind, straining every muscle to reach the front, ran Farwell.

Meanwhile Oscar's opponent had risen unsteadily to his feet. His eyes searched the ground, and he made a sudden dive. But McHale was before him.

He swooped on the revolver half buried in the dust, and whirled on the first comers, holding the weapon jammed tightly in front of his right hip.

"Don't crowd in on us with them shovels and things," he advised grimly. "There's lots of room right where you are."

The rush stopped abruptly. An ugly, short-barrelled gun in the hand of a man who bore all the earmarks of a hip shot was not to be treated lightly. There were rough and tough men in the crowd who were quite ready for trouble; but their readiness did not extend to rushing a gunman unless an urgent necessity existed.

Farwell broke through them, breathless from a sprint at top speed. He paid no attention whatever to McHale's weapon.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded. "You, Lewis, speak up!"

"This batty Swede tried to ride over me," Lewis replied. "I give him fair warnin', and then I downed his horse. When he hits the dirt he goes on the prod. These fellers pulled him off of me. That one's got my gun."

"You bet I have!" McHale interjected. "You tried to plug Oscar. I seen you cut down on him at about ten feet — and miss. Looks like you ain't got the nerve to hit anything that's *comin'* for you. You sorter confines your slaughter to harmless cayuses and such."

"Guess again," said Lewis, unmoved. "I thought I could stand the Swede off, that's why. I shot two foot high on purpose."

"You kel my Olga!" shouted Oscar. "Yust wait, you faller. Ay gat my goose gun, and Ay blow you all to hal! By Yudas, Ay gat skvare kvick!"

"This is crowding things," said Casey. "Mr. Farwell, you really must not plant gunmen by the trails with instructions to shoot our horses."

"Nobody has any such instructions," said Farwell. "This man tried to ride Lewis down, and he protected himself. I'm sorry it occurred, but we are not to blame."

"Without arguing that point," said Casey, "I warn you that we won't stand this sort of thing."

"If you fellows will keep off our lands there will be no trouble," Farwell responded. "We don't want you, and we won't have you. If you come on business, of course, that's different. Otherwise keep away. Also we don't want your stock grazing on our property."

"We may as well have an understanding while we're about it," said Casey. "The next man who pulls a gun on me — this Lewis, or anybody else — will have to beat me to the shooting. If you don't want your lands used as part of the range, fence them off. Don't interfere with a single head of my stock, either. And, if I were in your place, I'd offer

this man about two hundred dollars for his mare, and throw in an apology."

"But you're not in my place," snapped Farwell. "Nobody is going to pull a gun on you if you behave yourself. If this man puts in a claim for his horse, I'll consider it, but I won't promise anything." He turned to his men. "You get back to work, the lot of you." Without further words, he strode off to the camp.

Lewis stepped up to McHale. "I'll take my gun if you're through with it."

McHale handed him the weapon.

"I don't reckon she's accurate at much over ten yards," he observed. "If I was you, I'd fix myself with a good belt gun. It ain't unlikely I packs one myself after this, and we might meet up."

"Organize yourself the way you want to," said Lewis carelessly, slipping the weapon in his pocket. "And if you're a friend of that big Swede, tell him not to look for me too hard. I don't want to hurt him; but I ain't taking chances on no goose guns." He nodded and marched off after the others.

The three men, left alone, stood in silence for a moment. Then Oscar, with a rumbling curse, began to strip saddle and bridle from his dead pet mare, the tears running down his cheeks.

"And now what?" asked McHale.

"Now," Casey replied, "I guess we've got to make good."

CHAPTER XI

SOME two miles distant from the construction camp at the dam, a little cavalcade moved slowly through the darkness of a moonless, cloudy night. A southeast wind was blowing, but it was a drying wind, with no promise of rain. It had blown for days steadily, until it had sucked every vestige of moisture from the top earth, leaving it merely powdery dust. Because of it, too, no dew had fallen; the nights were as dry as the days.

In the grain fields, the continued blast had stripped the surface soil away from the young plants, wrenching and twisting them, desiccating their roots, which, still too feeble to reach what dampness lay lower down, sucked ineffectually at the dry breast of the earth. The plants they could not feed took on the pale-green hue of starvation. There, among the young grain, the stronger gusts lifted dust clouds acres in extent. Low down along the surface, the soil sifted and shifted continually, piling in windrows in spots, burying the young plants, leaving others bare. Odd little devils of whirlwinds, marked by columnar pillars of dust, danced deviously across the fields and along the trails. From the standpoint of

a disinterested person, the ceasless wind would have been unpleasant in its monotony; but from the viewpoint of a rancher it was deadly in its persistence.

The moving figures were so strung out that it appeared almost as though they were riding in the same direction fortuitously, without relation to each other. First came two horsemen; then, at an interval of five hundred yards, came a buckboard, with two men and a led horse. In the rear, five hundred yards back, were two more riders.

This order, however, was not the result of accident, but of calculation. The buckboard held Oscar and the elder McCrae. Also it contained a quantity of dynamite. Naturally, it was drawn, not by McCrae's eager road team, but by a pair of less ambition. And the riders, front and rear, were in the nature of pickets; for, though it was unlikely that any one would be met at that time of night, it was just as well to take no chances.

The riders in the lead were Casey Dunne and Tom McHale. Each had a rifle beneath his leg. In addition, McHale wore two old, ivory-handled Colts at his belt, and Dunne's single holster held a long automatic, almost powerful as a rifle. They rode slowly, seldom faster than a walk, peering ahead watchfully, their ears tuned to catch the slightest suspicious sound.

"This here is like old times," said McHale. "Durn

me if I hadn't about forgotten the feel of a gun under my leg. I wish we could have our photos took now. We sure look plenty warlike."

"I don't want any photo," said Casey. "If I can get home without meeting any one, it will suit me down to the ground. I wish we hadn't brought these guns. It's safer every way."

"It's safer for some people," McHale commented. "S'pose we struck hard luck to-night and got backed into a corner or followed up too close — how'd we look without guns? 'Course, I'd take awful long chances before I shot *at* anybody; but all the same a Winchester helps out a retirin' disposition a whole lot."

"No doubt about that. But the devil of packing a gun is the temptation to use it before you really have to. That accounts for a lot of trouble. Why, even in the old days, a man who didn't pack a gun was safe, unless he tracked up with some mighty mean specimen of a killer. And those dirty killers usually didn't last long."

"That's so in one way," McHale admitted, "but I look at it different. If nobody but the killers had packed guns they'd have run the whole show. Some of them gents killed for the fun of it, like a mink in a chicken coop. The mean sort'd pick out some harmless, helpless party, and stomp up and down, r'arin' and cussin' till they got up a big mad. Ther chances was about even they'd shoot. Usual they

didn't try them plays on men that wore their artillery in plain sight."

"Well, we haven't any killers now, anyway," said Dunne. "This is about as far as it's safe to go with the horses. We'll wait till the others come up."

In a few minutes, the faint straining of leather, creak of springs, and subdued clank of axles came to them. The buckboard loomed out of the darkness, and halted suddenly.

"That you, boys?" McCrae's voice asked.

"Yes. We won't take the horses any farther. If that watchman is on the dam to-night he might hear something. We can pack the powder the rest of the way ourselves."

The rear riders, young Sandy McCrae and Wyndham, arrived. Then a dispute arose. No one wished to remain with the horses. Casey Dunne settled it.

"There's only one man going to plant powder and cut fuses, and that's Oscar," said he. "If we all go messing around with it in the dark, half the shots won't fire, and we may have an accident. Outside of that there's nothing to do except take care of the watchman if he's there; and he's sure to be. Wyndham, you're not cut out for that sort of work. You will stay with the ponies. Now, McCrae, you'd better turn around and drive home."

McCrae pulled the team around. "Good luck, boys," said he quietly, and was gone. The spare

horse which had been tied to the buckboard remained for Oscar.

The Swede proceeded to load himself with dynamite, placing it around his legs in the high socks he wore, in the breast of his shirt, and in his pockets. This was the overflow from a gunny sack in which he carried the rest. He resembled a perambulating mine.

"Ay ban ready now," he announced.

"I say, Oscar, don't trip," said Wyndham facetiously.

"Nor interfere," McHale added. "Plant them number twelves of yours plumb wide apart, Oscar, and don't try to scratch your ankle with your boot."

Oscar grinned at them, his big, white teeth shining in the darkness. He attempted the repartee of his adopted country.

"You faller tenk you mek big yoke — vat!" said he. "You go to hal, please."

"Sure — if you bump anything hard," McHale retorted.

"Come on, come on!" said Casey impatiently.

Wyndham remained with the horses. He was to allow the others half an hour, and then bring the animals down nearer the dam, so that no time should be lost in getting away. His companions vanished in the darkness.

Young McCrae took the lead. In the moccasins he affected he trod noiselessly, making no more

sound than a prowling, nocturnal animal. Casey Dunne followed, almost as light-footed. Behind him Oscar clumped along, planting his heavy boots solidly at every step. McHale brought up the rear. Soon they struck an old cattle trail which wound down a short coulée and brought them to the bank of the river immediately below the dam. McCrae halted.

"There she is," he announced.

Across the river lay the huddled, black shapes of the camp buildings, with here and there a pallid spot which marked a tent. Not a light was visible there. Evidently the camp slept, and that was as it should be. But nearer at hand, beside the bank of the river where the bulk of the dam reared itself, a solitary light gleamed.

"That's the watchman," McCrae whispered. "We're in luck, boys. He's on this side."

"Say, Ay sneak up on dat faller," Oscar proposed. "Ay mek von yump — so! — and Ay gat him in de neck." He uttered a horrible sound, suggestive of death by strangulation.

"Shut up!" hissed young McCrae fiercely. "*Keep* him quiet, Tom!"

"Shut up, Oscar!" growled McHale. "Don't you savvy nothing? You and me ain't in on this. Stand right still now, and don't breathe no harder than you have to. Go to it, boys!"

If young McCrae had been a prowling animal before, he was now the ghost of one. Casey Dunne,

behind him, endeavoured to copy his noiseless method of progress. Gradually they drew near the light.

They could discern the figure of the watchman beside it. He was sitting on a stick of timber, smoking. McCrae drew from his pocket a long canvas bag, of about the dimensions of a small bologna sausage, and weighed it in his hand. They crept nearer and nearer. They were not more than ten feet away. The guardian of the dam laid his pipe on the timber, rose to his feet, and stretched his arms high above his head in a huge, satisfying yawn.

At that instant McCrae sprang like a lynx on a fawn. The sandbag whistled as it cut down between the u pstretched arms, and the watchman dropped as if hit by lightning.

"That was an awful crack, Sandy," said Casey reprovingly. He flashed the lantern at the face, and slipped his fingers to the wrist. To his relief, the pulse was strong.

"I had to get through his hat, hadn't I?" said McCrae. "I wasn't taking any chances. He's got a head like a bull. Come on, let's fix him up."

The watchman came out of their hands trussed up like a fowl for roasting, securely gagged, with a gunny sack drawn over his head and tied at the waist. They lifted him between them and bore him away from the dam to what they considered a safe distance.

"'Watchman, tell us of the night,'" chuckled Casey. "He's all right, by the way he kicks, and nothing can hit him away out there. They'll see him first thing in the morning. Hustle up Oscar, now. This is where he gets action."

Oscar, when he came up, got to work at once. Because the planting of shots by different men would have been both unsatisfactory and dangerous he worked alone. The others lay flat in the gloom, watching the lantern which he had appropriated flitting here and there along the structure.

"Oscar's some powder man, you bet," McHale observed. "He don't look like he had the savvy, but he'll cut them fuses so's the shots'll come mighty near together. Blamed if I know why a Swede takes to powder. Seems to come natural to 'em, like pawin' snow to a cayuse."

The light blinked and disappeared as Oscar descended. Followed a long interval of silent waiting. Then across in the camp a dog began to bark, at first uncertainly, with what was almost a note of interrogation, and then, as the wind brought confirmation of suspicion to his nostrils, with savage vigour. By the sound, he was apparently approaching the dam.

Some sleeper, awakened by the noise, yelled a profane command to the animal, which had no effect. It merely awakened another, who cursed the first sleepily.

"Hey, Kelly," he called, "hit that dog with a rock!" A pause. "Hey, Kelly, wake up, there!"

"I guess we've got Kelly," Casey whispered to Sandy. He called out hoarsely: "He'll quit in a minute! G'wan to sleep. You don't know your own luck."

But the dog continued to bark, jumping up and down frantically. A light appeared in a window of one of the shacks.

"Blazes!" muttered McHale, "somebody's getting up."

A low whistle came from behind them. It was significant of the tension of the moment that both McHale and McCrae jumped. But Dunne was cooler.

"That's only Wyndham with the horses," he said.

Suddenly a long aperture of light appeared in the dark wall of the shack. For a moment it was partially obscured by a figure, and then it vanished utterly. The door had closed. The light from the window remained.

"Somebody's come out," said McHale. "That's about where Farwell's shack is. What's keepin' Oscar? He's had time enough. Maybe I'd better go across and hold up this feller? We don't want ——"

The lantern bobbed into view once more. Oscar was coming at last, but he was taking his time about it. Had he placed the powder? Had he fired the

fuses? Or had something gone wrong at the last moment? They asked themselves these questions impatiently. It would be just like him to have forgotten his matches. It might not occur to him to use the lantern flame. In that case ——

"Come on, hurry up there!" McCrae called softly.

Oscar clambered up beside them. "Ay tal you somet'ing ——" he began. But the dog yelped suddenly. A sharp voice cut across to them:

"Kelly! What the devil's going on here? What are you about? Who's that with you?"

"Farwell!" Dunne whispered. "Did you light the fuses, Oscar?"

"Sure t'ing," Oscar replied. Proud of the phrase, he repeated it. "She ban light, all right."

"When'll she fire? Quick, now?"

"Mebbe fema minute. We ban haf lots of time to gat out of har. Say, Kessy, what faller ——"

An oath cracked in the darkness like a rifle shot.

"You, Kelly, answer me! Come across here at once!" He paused for a moment. "By thunder! Kelly, I'll come over there and ——"

Casey Dunne did not hear the conclusion of the sentence. His mind was working swiftly. For, if Farwell tried to come across, he would probably be killed by the coming explosions; and that must be prevented at any cost. The destruction of the dam was justifiable, even necessary. But homicide with it would never do. To shoot in self-defence or to

protect his rights was one thing; to allow a man to be killed by a blast was quite another. But just how to prevent it was the question.

"Come along, Casey," McHale urged. "We ain't got too much time."

"Time or not, we can't have Farwell hurt. You go. I'll be after you in a minute."

"If you stay we all stay," said McHale. "Let him take his chance. Come on!"

"Git, I tell you," Casey insisted. "I've got to keep him where he is till the first shot goes. He called out: 'All right, Mr. Farwell. You don't need to come. I'll be there.'"

"That's not Kelly's voice," snapped Farwell. "What deviltry's going on here?"

By his voice, Casey guessed that he was advancing. He dropped the pretence as useless. "Get back, there!" he ordered sharply, but endeavouring to disguise his natural voice. "Get back to your shack, you, or I'll drill you!"

Farwell's response came with surprising promptness in the form of a revolver bullet that sang just above Casey's head. By the momentary flash of the weapon his big figure was just discernible standing bent forward, legs wide apart, tense and watchful.

As Casey's hand dropped to his automatic, McHale clutched his wrist. "Don't shoot!" he whispered.

"I'm not going to hit him," Casey replied. "I'm just going to make him stay where he is."

"Let me," said McHale, and fired as he spoke. Farwell's revolver answered. They emptied the guns in the darkness; but as one shot high by accident and the other low by design, no damage ensued.

The camp, aroused by the shooting, buzzed like a hornet's nest. Lights appeared everywhere. Dark figures streamed out of doorways and thrown tent flaps; and, once outside, stood in helpless uncertainty.

"Coom, coom!" cried Osca. "Ve gat out of har!" They rose and ran in the dark.

A mighty roar drowned the echoes of the pistol shots, as the bass bellow of his sire might dominate the feeble bleatings of a new-born calf. A vivid flash split the night. In the momentary illumination details were limned sharply — the buildings, the groups of men on one side, the running figures on the other. And poised, stationary, as it seemed, in mid-air, above the instant eruption, hung a mushroom cloud of smoke and dust, specked with fragments of riven wood and shattered concrete. Through the succeeding contrasted blackness the débris thudded upon the earth. With scarcely an interval followed a second shot, a third, a fourth. The air became alive with hurtling masses raining from the heavens.

The four dynamiters reached Wyndham, who, cursing in his excitement, was straining every muscle

and a comprehensive vocabulary in an effort to hold the frightened horses.

Casey, McHale, and Sandy seized their nigh stirrups, shot them at their left toes, gripped saddle horns, and went up in an instant. Oscar, less expert, fumbled for a hold with his toe, hopping on his right leg as his horse sidled and backed.

"Stand still, Ay tal you!" he gritted. "By Yudas, Ay club hal from you purty kvick!"

Young McCrae wheeled his horse on the off side and gripped the headstall by the bit. "Up you go!" he cried, and Oscar fell into the saddle, the horn striking him amidships and momentarily checking a torrent of oaths. "Hang on, now!" McCrae ordered and let go.

They shot away with a wild plunge and a scurry of panicky hoofs. The going was rough, but luck was with them. They surged up the coulée, emerging on the higher bench land by the trail.

"Look here, Tom," said Dunne, "what did you want to do the shooting for back there? Afraid I'd get rattled and hit somebody?"

McHale grinned in the darkness. "Not hardly. Mostly, Casey, you *mamook tumtum* a heap — you look ahead and savvy plenty. You're foolish — the way an old dog fox is. But onct in a while you overlook a bet. You're too plumb modern and up to date."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A lot. I don't know no other man hereabouts that packs a forty-four automatic. See, now?"

"No."

"Why, Casey," said McHale, "I'm surprised at you! It's clear as gin. Them guns spits out the empty shells right where you stand. Farwell finds 'em, and he goes lookin' for a gun to fit 'em. You've got it. There ain't no other gun hereabouts that takes forty-four automatic ammunition. Now, my old gun don't leave no trail of ca'tridges to follow unless I breaks her open. So I just naturally horned in and played the hand myself."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN daylight fully disclosed the wreck, and also his night watchman lying helpless out of harm's way, Farwell was in a savage temper. Never before, in all his career, had anything like that been put over on him. And the knowledge that he had been sent there for the express purpose of preventing anything of the kind did not improve matters. He hated to put the news on the wire — to admit to headquarters that the ranchers apparently had caught him napping. But, having dispatched his telegram, he set his energies to finding some clew to the perpetrators of the outrage.

He drew a large and hopeless blank in Kelly, the watchman. Mr. Kelly's films ran smoothly up to a certain point, after which they were not even a blur. The Stygian darkness of his hiatus refused to lift by questioning. He had neither seen nor heard anything suspicious or out of the ordinary. About one o'clock in the morning he had laid down his pipe to rest his long-suffering tongue. Immediately afterward, so far as his recollection went, he found himself tied up, half smothered, with aching jaws and a dull pain in his head.

Farwell metaphorically bade this unsatisfactory witness stand aside, and proceeded to investigate the gunny sack, the rope that had tied him, and the rag and stick that had gagged him. Whatever information these might have given to M. Lecoq, S. Holmes, or W. Burns, they yielded none to Farwell, who next inspected the ground. Here, also, he found nothing. There were footmarks in plenty, but he could not read them. Though in the first flare of the explosion he had glimpsed three or four running figures, his eyes had been too dazzled to receive an accurate impression.

"Maybe an Australian nigger or a Mohave trailer could work this out," he said in disgust to his assistant, Keeler. "I can't."

"Well, say," said young Keeler, "talking about Indians — how about old Simon over there? Might try him."

He pointed. Just above the dam an Indian sat on a pinto pony, gazing stolidly at the wreck. His hair streaked with gray, was braided, and fell below his shoulders on either side. His costume was that of ordinary civilization, save for a pair of new, tight moccasins. Having apparently all the time there was, he had been a frequent spectator of operations, squatting by the hour watching the work. Occasionally his interest had been rewarded by a meal or a plug of tobacco. These things he had accepted without comment and without

thanks. His taciturnity and gravity seemed primeval.

"Huh! That old beat!" said Farwell contemptuously. "Every Indian can't trail. However, *we* can't, that's sure. Maybe he can make a bluff at it. Go and get him."

Keeler brought up old Simon, and Farwell endeavoured to explain what was wanted in language which he considered suited to the comprehension of a representative of the original North American race. He had a smattering of Chinook,* and for the rest he depended on gestures and a loud voice, having the idea that every man can understand English if it be spoken loudly enough.

"Simon," said he, "last night bad man come and *mamook* raise heap hell. Him blow up dam. You savvy 'dam,' hey?"

"Ah-ha!" Simon grunted proudly. "Me *kumtuks*. Me *kumtuks* hell. Me *kumtuks* dam. Dam good, dam bad; godam ——"

*Author's Note.— Chinook, the trade jargon of the Pacific coast, is similar in origin to the pidgin English of China. It is composite, its root words being taken from various tribal vocabularies and from the French and English languages. The spelling conforms to the pronunciation; and the latter in most cases is merely the Indian rendering of French and English word sounds. It is, in fact, an Indian Volapuk, used extensively by the tribes of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska. The number of words is comparatively small, probably not exceeding nine hundred. Therefore each has various meanings, rendered by shades of pronunciation or by combination with other words. Thus the word "*mamook*," signifying to do, to make, to perform, or anything denoting action, begins some two hundred phrases, for each of which there is one equivalent English word. Its nearest parallel is the French verb "*faire*," and its use is much the same. It is impossible in this space to attempt a vocabulary. "*Halo*" is the general negative. Throughout I have endeavoured to supply the meaning by the context.

"No, no!" rasped Farwell. "*Halo* cuss word — no bad word — no. D-a-m, 'dam.' Oh, Lord, the alphabet's wasted on him, of course. What's Siwash for dam, Keeler?"

"Search me," said Keeler; "but 'pence' is Chinook for fence, and 'chuck' means water. Try him with that." And Farwell tried again.

"Now, see, Simon! Last night *hiyu cultus* man come. Bring dynamite — *hiyu skookum* powder. Put um in dam — in *chuck pence.* Set um off. *Mamook poo!* — all same shoot. Bang! Whoosh! Up she go!" He waved his hand at the wreck. "You *kumtuks* that?"

Simon nodded, understanding.

"*Mamook* bang," said he; "*mamook* bust!"

"Right," Farwell agreed. "*Cultus* man come at night. Dark. Black. No see um." He made a footprint in the earth, pointed at it, and then to Simon, and waved a hand at the horizon generally. "You find trail, follow, catch um. Hey, can you do that, Simon? And I'll bet," he added to Keeler, "the infernal old blockhead doesn't understand a word I've said."

But Simon's reply indicated not only comprehension, but a tolerable acquaintance with modern business methods. Said he:

"How moch you give?"

Keeler grinned. "I think he gets you," he commented.

"I guess he does," Farwell admitted. "How much you want?"

"Hundred dolla'!" Simon answered promptly.

"Like blazes!" snapped Farwell. "You blasted, copper-hided old Shylock, I'll give you five!"

Simon held out his hand. The gesture was unmistakable.

"And they say an Indian doesn't know enough to vote!" said Farwell. He laid a five-dollar bill in the smoky palm. "Now get busy and earn it."

Simon inspected the ground carefully. Finally he took a course straight away from the dam.

"That's about where those fellows ran," said Farwell. "Maybe the old rascal can trail, after all."

Simon came to a halt at a spot cut up by hoofs. He bent down, examining the tracks carefully. Farwell, doing likewise, caught sight of a single moccasin track plainly outlined. It lay, long and straight-footed, deep in the soft soil; and where the big toe had pressed there was the mark of a sewn-in patch.

"Here, look here!" he cried. "One of 'em was wearing moccasins, and patched moccasins at that."

"Sure enough," said Keeler.

"Here, Simon, look at this," said the engineer. "You see um? One *cultus* man wear moccasin. Was he white man or Indian?"

Simon surveyed the track gravely, knelt, and examined it minutely. "Mebbyso Injun," he said.

"Mebbyso white man," Farwell objected. "What makes you think it's an Indian?"

"Oleman moccasin, him," Simon replied oracularly. "White man throw him away; Injun keep him, mend him — *mamook tipshin klaska.*"

"Something in that, too," Farwell agreed. "It's a straight foot — no swing-in to the toe. Still, I don't know. I've seen white men like that. I wonder ——" He broke off abruptly, shaking his head.

Simon gave a correct imitation of mounting a horse. "Him *klatawa,*" he announced. "Him Injun."

"Got on his horse and pulled out, hey?" said Farwell. "Yes, of course, that's what he did. That's why the track is pressed in so deep. That's all right. Simon, how many men stop last night?"

"Four, five cayuse stop," Simon answered. "Mebbyso four, five, man stop."

"Well, four or five cayuses must have left a trail of some kind. You find it. Follow — catchum. Find where they live — their *illahee,* where they hang out. You get that?"

Simon nodded and went to his horse. Farwell frowned at the lone moccasin track, and, lifting his eyes, beheld Simon in the act of mounting. Contrary to the custom of white men, the old Indian did so from the off side. Farwell swore suddenly.

"What?" Keeler asked.

"Hey, Simon!" said Farwell. "This man with oleman moccasin — him make track getting on cayuse? Him stand so to get on cayuse. You sure of that?"

Simon nodded. "Ah-ha!" he agreed.

"Then he's a white man," Farwell exclaimed. "This is the track of a right foot, made while he was standing reaching for the stirrup with the left. An Indian always gets on his horse from the wrong side, and puts his right foot in the stirrup first."

"So he does," said Keeler.

"So this fellow is a white man," Farwell concluded triumphantly. "We want a white man with a patched moccasin. You *kumtuks*, Simon? Injun mount so. White man so — left foot up, right foot down. White man's moccasin, Simon."

"Huh!" Simon grunted gravely. "Mebbyso white man; mebbyso *sitkum Siwash*."

"Half-breed nothing!" Farwell declared. "Straight white, I tell you. Now get ahead on the trail."

But whatever Simon's skill as a trailer, it availed little. In half a mile the hoofprints merged with many others in a beaten track, and so were lost. Simon halted.

"*Halo mamook!*" said he, signifying that he had done his possible. The fact was so self-evident that Farwell could not gainsay it.

"That's an easy five for you," he grumbled. "We might as well get back, Keeler. I never took

any stock in that old buck, anyway. He's a gold brick, like all the rest of them."

But Simon, when they had gone, kept along the beaten track. And shortly he came to where McCrae had turned the buckboard around. Simon, after examining the tracks, took pains to efface them entirely; after which he ambled on, his usually grave countenance illumined by a grin.

Following the road, peering narrowly at either side, he finally came in sight of Talapus Ranch. Halting, he surveyed the fields.

The ditches of Talapus were once more running rap-full; and Donald McCrae, his son, and half a dozen men were busy with shovels and hoes turning the water down among the young grain in marks already prepared which followed the natural slope of the land; taking care that the little rivulets should be of sufficient strength to run the length of the field, but not so strong as to wash out the soil; adjusting the flow to a nicety with miniature dams of sods and stones.

Old Simon rode slowly along the ditch until he came to where Sandy McCrae was working.

"Hello, Simon!" said the latter carelessly. "How you makin' it this morning? You keeping *skookum?*"

"Ah-ha!" Simon responded gutturally. "*Skookum*, you?"

"You bet," Sandy replied. "*Hiyu skookum* me."

He leaned on his shovel for a moment, stretching his young, sinewy body, grinning at the Indian. The latter dismounted, and, stooping down, touched the young man's worn footgear.

"*Mamook huyhuy* moccasin," said he.

"Swap moccasins?" Sandy repeated. "What for? Yours are new. *Chee* moccasin, you; oleman moccasin, me. What are you getting at? That's fool talk."

But Simon insisted. "*Mamook huyhuy*," said he. "*Halo mitlite oleman* moccasin."

"Why shouldn't I wear my old moccasins?" asked Sandy.

Simon lifted McCrae's right foot and placed his finger on a patch beneath the ball of the great toe. His features expanded in a knowing grin. Sandy McCrae's face suddenly became grave and his mouth grim. His voice, when he spoke, was hard and metallic.

"Quit this sign business and spit it out of you," he ordered. "*Mamook kumtuks!* Tell me what you mean!"

Simon condescended to a measure of English which he knew well enough, but which he usually disdained on general principles. He pointed back whence he had come.

"*Tenas* sun (early morning) me stop along camp. Boss *tyee* man goodandam mad. Him say *cultus* man *mamook* raise *hiyu* hell. Catch *hiyu skookum* powder — bang! Whoosh! Upshego!" He mim-

icked Farwell's words and gestures to a nicety. "Him say, s'pose me catch *cultus* man me catch *kwimnum* dolla'." He exhibited the five-dollar bill, grinning once more. "Good! Me *nanitch* 'round me find trail. Boss *tyee* man see track of oleman moccasin." He pointed to Sandy's right foot.

Young McCrae, his face black as the heart of a storm cloud, said nothing; but his eyes glinted dangerously. The Indian continued:

"Me *klatawa kimta* on trail. *Tyee* man him come, too. Bimeby come to *hiyu* trail, all same road. Me lose trail. Me tell *tyee* man '*halo mamook.*'" He grinned broadly. "Him *klatawa* back *yaka illahee.* Me come along alone. See where *chik-chik* wagon turn around. All right. Me come tell you *mamook huyhuy* moccasin."

It was very plain to Sandy now. The old Indian had recognized the track of his moccasin at the dam; had followed the trail to the travelled road where he had deliberately quit; and had come on to warn him to get rid of the incriminating moccasins which were even then on his feet. The suggestion of exchange was merely polite diplomacy.

"Simon," he said slowly, "blamed if you ain't a white Injun!"

Simon acknowledged the compliment characteristically. He produced a pipe and examined the empty bowl with interest.

"*Halo* smokin', me!" he observed gravely.

Sandy nodded and handed him a large plug. The Indian filled his pipe and put the tobacco in his pocket.

"You my *tillikum*," he announced. "When you *tenas* boy I like you, you like me. Good, *Kona-way* McCrae (every McCrae) my *tillikum*." He made a large gesture of generous inclusion, paused for an instant, and shot a keen glance at his friend. "Cas-ee Dunne my *tillikum*, too."

"Sure," said Sandy gravely. "We're all friends of yours, Simon."

Simon nodded and considered.

"All rancher my *tillikum*," he continued after an interval. "Ah-ha! Good! S'pose some time me *mamook* sick, me feel all same oleman — no more grub stop, no more smokin' stop — mebbyso all rancher *potlatch* grub, *potlatch* smokin', send doctin', send med'cin'? You *kumtuks?*"

He formulated this general scheme of pension and old-age insurance gravely. With five dollars in hand and a future provided for by grateful ranchers, he would be able to worship the *Saghalie Tyee* at the mission with a good heart.

"You don't want much," Sandy commented. "I guess we'd chip in, though, if you got up against the iron any time. Sure. S'pose you *mamook* sick, all rancher *mamook* help, give you *muckamuck* and smokin', stake you to doctor and dope; s'pose you go *mimoluse*, bury you in style."

Simon nodded, well pleased. A fine funeral thrown in for good measure suited his ideas perfectly. It was no more than his due for this evidence of friendship. So much for the future. Now for the present. He surveyed the five-dollar bill and chuckled.

"*Tyee* man *hyas* damfool!" said he. He cast a shrewd eye at the sun, which stood near the meridian. "*Sitkum sun!*" he announced.

"Noon — and that means you're hungry," said Sandy. "I never saw you when you weren't. Go on up to the house, and say I sent you. *Muckamuck mika sick yakwahtin.* Eat till your belly goes back on you, if you want to."

Simon grinned again; but he pointed to Sandy's feet.

"You *mamook hyuhuy* moccasin dam quick!" he warned once more.

CHAPTER XIII

CASEY DUNNE crossed from the Coldstream Supply Company's store — which was also the post office — to Bob Shiller's hotel. His pockets bulged with mail, for it was his first visit to town since the destruction of the dam a week before, and there was an accumulation of letters, newspapers, and periodicals. Ever since then he had been irrigating, throwing upon his thirsty fields every drop of water he could get.

As he came upon the veranda, he saw Shiller in conversation with a stranger.

"Oh, Casey," said Shiller, "I want you to shake hands with Mr. Glass. Mr. Glass — Mr. Dunne. Mr. Glass," the genial Bob went on, "has some notion of locating here if he can get a place to suit him. He likes the land, and he likes the climate; but the recent — the events — er — the way things shape at present has a *leetle* undecided him. Anything Mr. Dunne tells you, Mr. Glass, will be straight. He has land to burn, and one of our best ranches. Yes. I'll just leave you to talk it over together." And so saying, he executed a masterly retreat.

Glass was a mild, colourless, middle-aged man,

attired in worn hand-me-down garments. His blue eyes, clear and direct enough, seemed to hold a little of the pathetic apprehension and appeal of a lost puppy. He hesitated when he spoke, repeatedly qualifying his statements. His was the awkwardness of the man who, having spent his life in familiar surroundings in some small community, suddenly finds himself in new places among strangers. And, lacking adaptability, is constrained and ill at ease.

"You see, Mr. Dunne, it's this way with me," he began. And, appearing to remember something suddenly, he asked: "Hadn't we better have a drink?"

"Not unless you need it in your business," said Casey. "Sit down and smoke a cigar with me and tell me your trouble."

"Well, I'd just as soon," said Glass, plainly relieved. "I don't drink much myself. My wife don't like it. It's a bad example for the children. But I thought that out here, maybe from what I'd heard ——'

"Current Western fiction!" Casey laughed. "No, we don't drink every time we shake hands. Couldn't stand it. Well, what can I do for you?"

And thereupon Mr. Glass unbosomed himself ramblingly, with much detail, which included a sketch of his life and family history. Casey saw that Shiller had unloaded a bore on him.

Glass, it appeared, hailed from Maine, from the

vicinity of one of the "obscots" or "coggins." He had followed various callings — carpenter, market gardener, and grocer — with indifferent success; but he had succeeded in accumulating a few thousand dollars. His eldest girl was not well. Consumption ran in her mother's family. The doctor had ordered a dryer climate, a higher altitude. For some years Glass had been thinking of migrating westward; but he had stuck in the narrow groove, lacking the initiative to pull up stakes and see for himself the land in which others had prospered. This sickness had decided him — and here he was.

He liked the climate, which he was sure would be just the thing for his daughter; and he liked the land. But here was the point — and it was the point which was worrying Sleeman grayheaded. There was trouble between the ranchers and the land company. Not that it was for him to say who was right or wrong. But there *was* trouble. Now, he was a man of small means, and he was forced to put all his eggs in one basket. Which was to say, that if he bought land, and subsequently was unable to get water for it, he would be ruined. Also he had heard that the ranchers were unfriendly to those who bought land from the company.

"And I'm a man that has kept out of trouble all my life, Mr. Dunne," he concluded plaintively. "I'm on good terms with everybody at home, and I wouldn't want, right at the start-off, as you might

say, to have anybody think I was trying to take water away from him. And yet I like the country. I thought maybe you could advise me what to do. It seems like a lot of gall asking you, too; you having land for sale and me thinking of buying the company's. But, then, I saw their advertising. It was only right I should go to them, wasn't it?"

"Of course," said Casey. "I haven't any land for sale now. I'm holding what I have. But as to advising you, it's a difficult thing. Here's the situation: The amount of the total water supply is limited. The railway claims the right to take it all, if it likes. We claim enough to irrigate our properties. Right there we lock horns. There is a lawsuit just starting; but the Lord only knows which way it will be settled, or when. And now you know as much about it as I do."

"It don't look good," said Glass, shaking his head. "No, sir, it don't look good to me. And here's another thing. They tell me that there was trouble out here a ways the other night. I mean with the company's dam. Of course, I don't know anything about it myself; it's just what I've heard. I hope you don't mind me speakin' of it."

"Not in the least. Well, what about it, Mr. Glass?"

"It was a turrible risky thing to do — to blow up a dam," said Glass. "It'd be against the law, wouldn't it? Of course, I don't say it was. It

might not be. I don't claim to know, and likely whoever done it had reasons. All the same, I wouldn't choose to be mixed up in doin's like that."

"Good thing to keep out of," Casey agreed.

"I wouldn't want anything of mine to be blown up."

"But who would blow up anything of yours?"

"I don't say anybody'd do it, of course," Glass protested hastily. "Only, you see, men that'd blow up a dam are — I mean, if I bought land off of the company and started in to use water and farm, they might blame me. I wouldn't want to get my neighbours down on me, Mr. Dunne."

"Does that mean you think that some of your prospective neighbours blew up the dam?"

"No, no," Glass disclaimed, in a flurry. "I don't know who did it, of course. I'm not saying anybody did. Only somebody must of. That's just common sense. You'll admit that yourself."

"Why, yes, that's a pretty safe conclusion," Casey agreed. "I don't think you need worry about that, though. The only point is whether the company will be able to keep an agreement to supply you with water. I can't tell you whether they will or not. If you buy you take a chance. If you bought from me, you'd take almost the same chance."

"I don't know what to do," said Glass, picking nervously at his white-metal watch chain. "It's hard to tell — there's so many things to be con-

sidered. I can't afford to lose money. This irrigation's new to me. I never saw it working. Would you mind if I came out to your farm and sort of looked around? I could learn a lot that way. Maybe if you had time, you could explain what I didn't understand? But, then, I wouldn't want to trouble you."

But Casey Dunne was already tired of Glass, of his timidity, his indecision, his self-effacement, his continual air of apology for existence.

"Come any time," he said. "Glad to see you. Sorry I can't do any more for you; but you'll have to decide for yourself."

"Yes, I know," Glass agreed dismally. "I'll look around first. I'm obliged to you. You — you're sure you won't have a drink? No. Well, I guess I'll go in and write a letter to my wife. I write to her twice a week. I'll see you later, maybe."

Casey nodded, glad to be rid of him. He put his feet on the rail and proceeded to go through his correspondence, which, though bulky, was not especially important.

"The mails would be a whole lot lighter if it wasn't for fake oil and cement propositions and special offers of the world's best authors," he grumbled. "Promoters and publishers seem to consider the small post office the natural breeding ground for suckers. Maybe they're right, too. Hello! Here's something different."

It was a large, square, white envelope, perfectly plain, but of aristocratic finish and thickness.

"Wedding — for the drinks!" growled Casey. "Not so different, after all." He ripped it open ruthlessly with his thumb. "Here's where I get set back a few dollars starting another domestic plant. Blamed if it's any better than — hello!"

It was not a wedding announcement. Instead, it was a check. The amount thereof was the surprising sum of eighty cents, exchange added; and the signature, firm, square, clear-cut as lettering, was "*Clyde Burnaby.*"

"Now what the devil?" Casey exclaimed, and jerked out the accompanying letter.

It was merely a short, friendly note. Miss Burnaby inclosed her check for one year's interest, at 8 per cent. on the loan from Mr. Dunne. She referred to the Wades. Gave an item or two of unimportant personal news. Hoped that his ranch was flourishing, and that he was well: and was his very cordially.

In feminine fashion followed a postscript:

> Kitty Wade tells me that you are having trouble with some company which is taking water that you need for your ranch. I hope it isn't serious trouble, though she hinted as much. Do you care to tell me about it?

Casey Dunne sat for some minutes, the check and letter across his knees, while he gazed unblinkingly

through the hot sunshine. It was some time since he had given Clyde Burnaby more than an occasional thought; his immediate affairs had been too pressing. Now the vision of her, as he had seen her last, rose before his eyes, and he found it a pleasant recollection. He, whose life since childhood had been passed in the outposts and beyond them, treasured the memories of the few occasions when chance had permitted him to sit with his own kind, to talk to them, to live as he would have lived had not fate forced him to hoe his own row, and chosen for him a row in the new lands.

Of the women he had met in these rare incursions he could recall none who pleased him as well as Clyde Burnaby. Her interest in his affairs pleased him also. He recalled her as she had sat across the aisle in the Pullman, her absolute frigidity to the advances of the would-be Lothario, her haughty stare when she had suspected him of like intent, her perfect composure during the holdup. Little things like that showed the stuff a girl was made of. Nothing foolish or nervous or hysterical about her. And then, subsequently, when he had met her on her own ground, she had endeavoured to put him at his ease. Funny that, but he appreciated it, nevertheless. And she could talk. She didn't giggle and ask inane questions. Nor did she treat him as some sort of a natural curiosity, who might be expected to do something shocking but entertaining at any moment.

She was sensible as — well — as sensible as Sheila McCrae herself.

And that, Casey reflected, was by way of being a high compliment; for Sheila had more sense than most men. He would take her opinion on any subject as well worth consideration. She and Clyde Burnaby were two young women very much above the ordinary run — in his opinion, at least.

Idly he wondered if chance would ever bring them together. Unlikely. Because he had nothing else to do at the moment, he amused himself by a process of transposition, of transmigration. He imagined Clyde Burnaby in Sheila's place, riding Beaver Boy over the brown swells, along the narrow trails and abrupt rises of the foothills, raising several hundred chickens, helping with the housework, the mending — all the daily feminine chores that fell to the lot of a rancher's womenkind. Would she be as good a friend to him as Sheila had been? And he fancied Sheila in her place — tailor-mades and evening gowns instead of riding skirts, Paris instead of pony hats, with nothing in particular to do but have a good time and spend money. Make good? Of course she would. She was clean-cut, thoroughbred, smart as a whip. Perhaps she wasn't quite as good-looking as Miss Burnaby; but, after all, that was largely a matter of taste. She was a different style.

He looked at the check lying on his knee, and laughed at the idea of interest on ten dollars. He

had forgotten all about that conceit, but she had not. He would frame the check — yes, that was what he would do. In time there would be quite a bunch of them — that is, if she remembered to send them. Well, anyway, he would have to acknowledge it, and he might as well do it at once.

He went indoors and began to write. He had intended but a brief note, but in construction it lengthened. With him letter writing was never an effort. He wrote as easily as he talked, colloquially, without any attempt at style or set phrase. Soon he found himself tersely describing the water situation, forecasting the probabilities. As these were not too cheering, he frowned and added an optimistic sentence or two for general effect. He concluded with a hope that she would some time honour his country with a visit, when his ranch and all it contained — including its owner — would be entirely at her service.

On his way to post the letter he passed Glass, still struggling with his own composition. That poor devil! A perfect type of incompetent. He was too slow and timid for the West — too old to learn the lessons of self-reliance and adaptability of a new land. However, that was his own affair. If he would work he could make a living, and that was all that he or those like him could make anywhere.

Dunne strolled down to the station to mail his letter in the box there; and, as he turned the corner of the building, he came full upon Farwell and an-

other burly individual in conversation with Quilty, the station agent.

"Tell them to start a tracer from the other end after those car numbers," Farwell was commanding; "and you start one from here. I've got to have them right away; work's at a standstill. Those cursed fatheads in the freight department don't know enough to shovel ballast. Get after them with a sharp stick."

"I'll do me best for ye," Quilty promised; "but freight on this line comes whin ut comes."

"It will come when I want it, or somebody will lose a job," said Farwell. "I'm not the ordinary consignee, and you can tell them that, too."

"I'll do that same," said Quilty; "but I misdoubt if a cyar wheel turns the faster for ut. I mind back in eighty-five — or maybe 'twas eighty-three ut was — whin O'Brien — 'Flapjack' O'Brien they called him then, though he's climbed high enough since — well, whin O'Brien was a plain, iveryday, thievin' conthractor, and a dom bad wan at that, he had a nephew named Burke that married a Finnegan — or maybe ut was Finucane — whose father pulled ould Sivinty-six, a wood-burnin' monsthrosity iv an ingin' that be th' grace iv God an' a full sand box might be good for a 3-per-cent grade anny dry day in summer but a Friday. Annyways, as I started to tell ye, Danny Powers fired for Finnegan or Finucane, whichever ut was, and him and this Burke ——"

But Farwell cursed Powers and Burke. "You burn the wires getting those cars for me!" he ordered. "What the devil do I care for all those construction-days micks? You talk too much. Get busy!" With which he turned and walked away with his companion.

"Pleasant gentleman, Corney!" Casey ventured.

The little station agent winked. "Th' black dog is on him sure enough," he observed. "Since his dam was blowed up, he has th' civil word for nobody. Listen, now, Casey. Somebody will pay for that night's work."

"I don't quite get you, Corney."

"Oh, divil th' fear iv yez not gettin' me. I'm not speakin' now in me official capacity; for praise God this dam is outside th' duties iv me jurisdiction. I'm tellin' ye as a friend."

"I know, Corney; but tell me a little plainer."

"Plainer is ut? Yez are a man grown. Do yez think yez can crim'nally an' wid conthributory vi'lence aforethought dynymite me employers' property, an' no comeback at all? Have sinse!"

"Hold on," said Casey. "Go slow, Corney." But Mr. Quilty dismissed this preliminary objection with a wave of his hand.

"Thim's figgers iv speech. I assume yez are innocent until yez are caught. Faix, it's not me'd give th' hot tip iv a warnin' to a crim'nal. But whisper now! Th' comp'ny is for siftin' this outrageous out-

rage to th' bottom, an' then liftin' th' bottom to look under it. Havin' put its hand to th' plow, it will l'ave no stone unturned to probe th' mysthry. Ye seen that felly wid Farwell. He's th' railway detective!"

"Meaning that they're out to round up somebody, eh?" said Casey. "All right, Corney; let 'em go to it."

"In me official capacity," said Mr. Quilty, looking him sternly in the eye, "I hope th' dirty blagyards is caught red-handed and soaked hard for th' shameless and di'bolical atrocity they have perpetuated. For such abandoned miscreants hangin' is too dom ladylike a punishment. I want yez to understand me official sintimints in me official capacity clearly. Yez may quote me exact words if ye feel so disposed."

"In your official capacity," said Casey, "your official sentiments do you great credit."

"I'm glad ye think so," said Mr. Quilty; "for in me private capacity, speakin' widout prejudice to me salary and as a true son iv dear, ould, dirty Dublin to a friend, me private sintimints is these: Th' man that invinted dynymite should have a set iv goold medals th' size iv a compound's dhrivers. But if iver ye mintion me private sintimints to a soul, I'll have yer life!"

CHAPTER XIV

FARWELL was by nature obstinate; he was also resourceful, and accustomed to carrying out his instructions by hook or by crook. That was one reason why he was such a valuable man. He accomplished his ends or his employers' ends after some fashion. Therefore, when the almost completed dam was destroyed, he recognized merely a temporary, if expensive, setback. The company could afford to pay for any number of dams; but, in order to push their sales, and, as a first step toward acquiring other properties at a minimum figure, they wanted the water on their lands at once. Very well, they should have it.

Though the dam was practically wrecked, the main canal was intact. Its intake was just above the dam, solidly built of masonry, with sluice gates to control the volume of water. Without the dam it carried a comparatively small stream. With the dam, and the consequent raising of the water level, it would roar full from wall to wall, a river in itself.

Just at its lower lip Farwell began to drive piles at an angle upstream. He sank brush with hundreds of bags of sand, made cribwork filled with

whatever rubbish came to his hand, and soon he had the makings of a temporary dam, rude, but effective. It would serve three purposes: It would fill the company's ditches; it would practically empty the ranchers'; and it would render the rebuilding of the permanent dam easier. Farwell was quite satisfied with himself.

Meanwhile, he found time to ride over to Talapus occasionally. His footing there was anomalous, and he felt it. On the one hand he wished the McCraes well and had done all he could for them; on the other he was ruthlessly carrying out a project which would ruin them. Under these circumstances he looked for no more than tolerance. He now owned frankly to himself that he was in love with Sheila. He had made little progress with his wooing, nor did he expect to make more just then. His blunt assertiveness covered a natural shyness where women were concerned, and he had about as much idea of the fine points of the game as a logger has of cabinet-making. Still, he was drawn to her by a desire which he was unable to resist. He had a profound belief in himself and in his capacity for material success; he considered himself an eligible match for any girl, and he relied on Sheila's good sense to realize what he had taken pains to make plain — that while his loyalty to his employers forced him to carry out their instructions, his sympathies were with her and her family. Of this he had given indubitable

proof. He had no intention of dropping out of sight, of discontinuing his visits, so long as they were tolerated, of leaving the field clear to another, perhaps to Dunne. With her he bore a white flag always, insisting that between them there was friendly truce.

He was of the opinion that the McCraes, father and son, had no hand in the dynamiting; though he conceded that they could make an excellent guess at the perpetrators. But Farwell thought he could do that himself; he fixed the responsibility on Casey Dunne.

The McCraes did not mention the dam, but Farwell had no hesitation in broaching the subject. He predicted speedy and exemplary punishment for the guilty.

Donald McCrae listened gravely, his face expressionless. Sandy wore a faint, ironic smile which irritated Farwell.

"You don't think so?" asked the engineer pointedly.

"You're doing the talking — I'm not," said Sandy.

Farwell reddened angrily. There was more in the tone than in the words. It implied that talk was Farwell's long suit. Farwell disliked Sandy extremely, but with a self-control which he rarely exercised, forbore to retort. Hot-tempered as he was, he realized that he could not declare his belief in

the guilt of any person without some evidence. His smouldering eye measured Sandy, taking him in from head to foot, and rested on the smoky golden tan of a pair of new moccasins which he wore.

Now, Sandy had acquired the moccasin habit in childhood and retained it. It was rarely that he wore boots around the ranch. Farwell, looking at the new moccasins, which were handsomely embroidered with silk thread, noted the straight inner line of the foot, from toe to heel. It was like the foot of an aborigine; undeformed, undeflected from nature's lines by fashionable footgear. By suggestion the moccasin track at the dam occurred to him. He recalled its straight inner line. McCrae's moccasined foot would make just such a track. Was it possible that he, at least, was one of the dynamiters?

Not only possible, Farwell decided, after a moment's reflection, but probable. The elder man he exonerated mentally. The son, young, hostile, possessing unlimited nerve, was just the man for such an enterprise. And if he were concerned in it, and the fact were ascertained what a devil of a mess it would make!

For a moment he was tempted to test his suspicion by some pointed allusion, but thought better of it. And shortly after the two men withdrew, leaving him with Sheila.

"This is a nasty business," said Farwell, after a long pause, reverting to the former topic. "I

wouldn't like it — no matter what turns up — to make any difference between us."

"There isn't much difference to make," she reminded him.

"No, I suppose not," he admitted, slightly disconcerted. "We're merely acquaintances. Only" — he hesitated — "only I thought — perhaps — we might be friends."

Which was going very strong — for Farwell. He said it awkwardly, stiffly, because he was quite unaccustomed to such phrase. Sheila smiled to herself in the growing darkness.

"Well, friends if you like. But then we are of different camps — hostile camps."

"But I'm not hostile," said Farwell. "That's nonsense. Business is business, but outside of that it cuts no ice with me."

"Doesn't it?"

"Not with me," he declared stoutly. "Not a bit. You didn't blow up the dam. Even if you had ——"

"Even if I had ——"

"I wouldn't care," Farwell blurted. "Thank the Lord I'm not narrow-minded."

Sheila laughed. Her estimate of Farwell did not credit him with wideness of outlook. But her reply was prevented by the *thud-thud* of rapid hoofs. A horse and rider loomed through the dark.

"Hello, Sheila!" the rider called.

"Why, Casey, this is luck!" she exclaimed. Far-

well scowled at the evident pleasure in her voice. "Light down. Better put your horse in the stable."

"That you, McCrae?" said Dunne, peering at the glow of Farwell's cigar. "I want to see you about ——"

"It's Mr. Farwell," Sheila interjected quickly.

A pause. Casey's voice, smooth, polite, broke it.

"I didn't recognize you, Mr. Farwell. How are you?" He dismounted, dropped his reins, and came upon the veranda. "Lovely night, isn't it? Well, and how is everything going with you?"

"I'm fairly busy," Farwell replied grimly, "thanks to the actions of some persons who imagine themselves unknown."

Casey Dunne lit a cigar and held the match in his hand till the flame touched his fingers. He spoke through the ensuing greater darkness:

"I heard that your dam wasn't holding very well."

"Not very well," Farwell agreed, struggling with his temper. "Perhaps you *heard* that it was dynamited?"

"I think I've heard most of the rumours," Dunne responded calmly.

"I have no doubt of that," Farwell observed with meaning.

"Great country for rumours," Casey went on. "Somebody always knows your inmost thoughts. Your intentions are known by others before you know them yourself. You are no exception, Mr.

Farwell. The mind readers are busy with you. No action you might take would surprise them. They are quite ready for anything."

"I may surprise these wise people yet," said Farwell. "I suppose they counted on depriving our lands of water by destroying our dam?"

"That's certainly an original way of putting it," said Casey. "Well?"

"Well, they didn't foresee that, though our permanent work is wrecked, and will take time to rebuild, we would put in a temporary wing of logs, brush, and sand which would give us a partial supply."

"No, they didn't foresee that, likely," Casey admitted. "This wing dam of yours is quite an idea. By the way, I'm not getting enough water now, myself. Couldn't you get along with less than you are taking?"

"No," Farwell returned shortly.

"These wise people thought you could or would," said Casey, and, turning to Sheila, asked for her father. A few minutes afterward he strode off in search of him.

Farwell endeavoured to pick up the broken thread of conversation with Sheila. But this proved difficult. She was preoccupied; and he himself found Dunne's concluding words sticking in his memory. Did they hide a sinister meaning? He disliked Dunne heartily, and he was jealous of him besides,

without having any definite cause; but he no longer underrated him.

On his way to camp he turned the problem over and over in his mind, but could make nothing of it, unless the words foreshadowed an attempt on the temporary dam. But there seemed to be little chance for the success of such an undertaking. Big acetylenes flared all night by the makeshift structure, and two men with shotguns watched by it. The whole camp was under almost martial law.

Farwell walked down to the river before he retired, to find the watchman very wide awake and a torrent booming through the stone-faced canal intake, to be distributed through a network of ditches upon the company's lands miles away. Farwell, satisfied, instructed the watchmen to keep a bright lookout, and turned in.

Once in the night he awoke with the impression that he had heard thunder, but as the stars were shining he put it down to a dream and went to sleep again. In the morning one of the watchmen reported a distant sound resembling a blast, but he had no idea where it was. Farwell attached no importance to it.

But in the middle of the morning his ditch foreman, Bergin, rode in angry and profane. And his report caused similar manifestations in Farwell.

The main canal and larger ditches had been blown up in half a dozen places, usually where they wound

around sidehills, and the released water had wrought hideous damage to the banks, causing landslides, washing thousands of tons of soil away, making it necessary to alter the ditch line altogether or put in fluming where the damage had occurred.

Nor was this all. Some three miles from the camp the main canal crossed a deep coulée. To get the water across, a trestle had been erected and a flume laid on it. The fluming was the largest size, patent-metal stuff, half round, joined with rods, riveted and clinched. To carry the volume of water there were three rows of this laid side by side, cemented into the main canal at the ends. It had been a beautiful and expensive job; and it reproduced finely in advertising matter. It was now a wreck.

Farwell rode out with Bergin to the scene of devastation. Now trestle and fluming lay in bent, rent, and riven ruin at the bottom of the coulée. The canal vomited its contents indecently down the nearest bank. A muddy river flowed down the coulée's bed. And the peculiarly bitter part of the whole affair was that the water, following the course of the coulée, ran back into the river again, whence it was available for use by the ranchers. It was as if the river had never been dammed. What water was diverted by the temporary dam got back to the river by way of the canal and coulée, somewhat muddied, but equally wet, and just as good as ever for irrigation purposes.

Bergin cursed afresh, but Farwell's anger was too bitter and deep for mere profanity. He sat in his saddle scowling at the wreck.

Once more it had been put over on him. He thought he had taken every possible precaution. Of course, ditches might be cut at any time; short of a constant patrol there was no way of preventing that. But this coulée was a thing which any man with eyes in his head and a brain back of them might have seen and thought of. And he had allowed this costly bit of fluming to lie open to destruction when it was the very key to the situation, so far as the ranchers were concerned!

His instructions had been to take the water to bring them to a properly humble frame of mind. It was part of his job to protect his employers' property; that was what he was there for. He had taken ordinary precautions, too, so far as the dam was concerned. But he had entirely overlooked the fact, as obvious as that water runs downhill, that if his canal were cut at the coulée its contents must flow back into the river. Everything was now set back. With this second outrage land sales would stop altogether. It was a sickening jolt. He thought of the questions he would have to answer. He would be asked why he hadn't done this. It would be no answer to point out that he had done that. People were always so cursed wise after the event!

And then he remembered Casey Dunne's words. Dunne had said that he was not getting enough water, had asked for more, had practically given him warning. Now every rancher's ditches were running full, and all he had to show for his work was a horrible mass of wreckage.

Farwell had disliked Dunne at first sight; now he hated him. He would have liked to come to actual grips with him, to break that lean, wiry body with his own tremendous strength, to bruise and batter that quietly mocking face with his great fists.

But the worst of it all was that he had nothing to go on. There was not a shred of evidence to connect Dunne with the destruction of the dam and flume. The detective sent down by the company had looked wise but had found out nothing. The only thing in the nature of a clew was a moccasin track, and that led to young McCrae, whom, for Sheila's sake, he did not wish to involve. He felt that through no fault of his own he had made a mess of everything. The ranchers had won every round. As Africa had been the grave of countless military reputations, so Farwell saw his own repute interred along the Coldstream.

Something had to be done. He was tired of taking unavailing precautions, of sitting passively waiting for attacks. In the nature of things it was impossible to guard adequately works extending over

miles of uninhabited country. Guerilla warfare could not be met by regular tactics.

As he scowled down at the muddy torrent an idea began to germinate in his mind. The main thing was to crush these ranchers, to bring them to their knees. After that all would be easy, there would be an end of difficulties. The engineering problems were the least. He had a free hand; he was backed by an enormous corporation which would go the limit. He resolved to fight fire with fire — to give the ranchers a dose of their own medicine.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Clyde Burnaby entered Wade's office, that busy lawyer was much surprised. "I thought you had gone away," he said as they shook hands. "It beats me how any young woman with the price of an elsewhere can stay in this town in summer."

Clyde laughed as she sat down. She looked deliciously cool, though the mercury was in the nineties, and the dusty cañonlike streets were like ovens. "I was on the point of going," she admitted, "but I don't know where to go. I came for some information on another point, Mr. Wade."

"Yes?" said Wade interrogatively. "We carry a very complete stock of information here." He waved a hand at the formidable rows of half-calf and circuit bindings in his bookcase. "What particular shade, model, or style may I show you? Something seasonable and yet durable? Here is a very attractive and well-bound ten-pound creation covering most of the common or garden varieties of contract, including breach of promise to marry. Nice summer reading. Or, perhaps ——"

"Now *do* you think any sensible man would break such a promise to me?" she laughed.

"You know the answer already," Wade replied. "You are a very good-looking young woman — almost as good-looking as Kitty."

"Model husband," Clyde commented approvingly. "Kitty is a darling. But to come to the point, Mr. Wade, I want some information about Mr. Dunne."

"Casey Dunne?" inquired Wade, with a slight lift of his brows. "What has he been doing? What do you want to know about him?"

"I want to know about his business affairs — or perhaps I should say his business troubles."

"Why?" Wade asked bluntly, eying her with curiosity.

Clyde's colour heightened a little but she met his gaze directly. "I had a letter from him," she replied, "in which, among other things, he referred to his troubles with the railway company that owns land in his district — troubles about water. It seems to be a serious matter."

"How did he happen to write you about it?" asked Wade. "Do you correspond? I beg your pardon. It's none of my business, but Casey isn't given to telling his troubles."

"I think," said Clyde, "I had better tell you how I first met Mr. Dunne." She did so, considerably to Wade's surprise.

"That's just like Casey all through," he commented. "Close as a clam. Never told me about meeting you before. And so he lent you ten dollars! You!" He chuckled at the idea. "Well, later he may have a use for that same ten."

"You really mean that? If money would help him now ——"

"It isn't necessary just yet. I'll tell you how matters stand." He did so with brevity and lucidity. "The situation now is that the government leaves the right to water to be determined by the courts. The court won't sit till some time in September. So there you are. Meanwhile the company is trying to take the water and the ranchers are trying to prevent them. So far nobody has been hurt, but I'm afraid, with the bitterness which is sure to develop, there may be serious trouble at any time."

"Mr. Dunne and his friends have not funds for a long legal fight?"

"No. Casey himself is land poor — that is, he has put every dollar he could rake together into land. He will either go broke or make a killing. The others have good ranches, but no money. And they can't raise any on their land, for nobody would lend under these conditions. Their very existence is involved."

"I have plenty of money," said Clyde. "More than I know what to do with; more than I can ever spend, living as I do. I will give you a check now

for whatever sum you require to take this case to the very highest court."

"That's a very generous offer," said Wade, "but I can't accept it. It's not merely a case of lack of the sinews of war. It's a case of a huge corporation against a few individuals with as little influence as they have money. You might put up law costs to an enormous extent uselessly. You see, you would be bucking Western Airline. Your respected uncle might do that, but you can't."

Clyde's smooth forehead wrinkled thoughtfully. But she merely said: "If I can do anything — with money or in any other way — for Mr. Dunne and his friends, I'm ready to do it."

"I don't know what you can do just now," said Wade. "I'm going on a vacation for a few weeks. Most of it I intend to spend out in that part of the country. When I return I'll know more about it."

"Is Kitty going, too?" Clyde asked.

"She wants to, but I don't like the idea. It's a little rough there. I'd prefer her to go where she'd be more comfortable."

"She wouldn't enjoy it alone."

"Suppose you keep her company," Wade suggested. "She'd be delighted."

"Suppose," said Clyde, "we both keep you company?"

"Eh!" said Wade.

"Well, why not? We're both sick of dressed-up

summer resorts. I want to see this country of Mr. Dunne's. We can rough it if we have to. We'll have a camp or take a house — we'll get along somehow."

"Oh, nonsense!" Wade objected. "You wouldn't like it. It's as hot as perdition in the daytime. You'd be sick of it."

"If we don't like it we can leave. If Kitty will go and doesn't object to me, will you take us both?"

"You'll both go if you want to, whether I say 'no' or not," said Wade. "Is this a put-up job? Have you fixed it with Kitty?"

"Not yet," said Clyde, her eyes twinkling, "but I'm going to."

From Wade's office Clyde went straight to the headquarters of the Hess System, finding its chief in the act of leaving.

Jim Hess was big, carelessly dressed, kindly faced, and the gray of his close-clipped moustache was yellowed by smoke. He sat down and motioned his niece to a seat, his hand mechanically searching for a cigar.

"Well, young lady, what's the trouble?" he asked.

"I want about fifteen minutes of your time, Uncle Jim."

"Easy," Hess commented. As a rule he was sparing of words. "I was afraid you wanted to borrow money." Nevertheless he eyed her shrewdly.

She was a great favourite of his, and he devoted much more time to her affairs than she suspected.

Beginning at the beginning, she told him of Casey Dunne, her meeting with him, the water trouble, and the attitude of the Western Airline. Her memory was good and her understanding excellent. Therefore she was able to state the case clearly.

"This Dunne and his friends," Hess commented, "seem to me to be up against it."

"I thought that you might be able to do something to help them."

"What?"

"I didn't know. But you are a railway man. You may have some influence with Mr. York or his directors. Perhaps you might bring influence to bear."

Hess smiled grimly. "Old Nick has more influence with York than I have. He crosses the street when he sees me. I like him about as much as he likes me. He's boss of his own show — his directors cut no ice. Anyway, it's none of my business. I've no excuse for butting in." Her face showed her disappointment. "I'm sorry," said Hess. "I'd do anything I could for you, little girl, or for any one who ever did you a good turn. But you see how it is. I can't ask favours of York and his crowd. If I did they'd only refuse."

"Of course not — if it's that way," Clyde ac-

knowledged. "I didn't know. I thought you might be able to do something or suggest something."

Hess was silent, smoking meditatively, drawing aimless lines on a blotter. "Got much money loose?" he asked suddenly.

"Plenty," Clyde replied. "Why?"

"Well," said Hess slowly, "just at present Western Air looks to me like good buying."

"Does it? I'll buy a little, if you say so."

"Don't say I said so; don't mention my name. Tell your brokers to buy quietly at the market just as much as you can stand. Tell 'em to buy till you countermand their instructions. I'll let you know when to do that. Tell 'em to buy at the present market. If the price breaks keep on buying. And if you go away anywhere let me know where a wire will get you."

"Thanks, Uncle Jim," said Clyde. "You think Western Air is a good investment, then?"

"I didn't say that — I said it was good buying," said Hess. "It's not high now. Some day" — he hesitated — "some day it ought to be worth as much as Hess System — as much as one of our own stocks."

With this prophecy, which he appeared to regret, Jim Hess patted his niece on the shoulder, told her not to worry about other people's troubles, and departed to keep his engagement.

Clyde immediately rang up Mrs. Wade, and, find-

ing her at home, proceeded there at once, to "fix" matters; a thing by no means hard to accomplish, for Kitty Wade found the prospect of a lonesome vacation very unattractive, and was a willing conspirator.

"We'll just *make* Harrison take us," she declared. "We'll have all sorts of a good time, too, riding and driving and fishing and whatever else they do. Won't it be a relief not to have to dress up? And I'll be an ideal chaperon, dear, upon my word."

"Oh, my liking for Mr. Dunne hasn't reached that stage," laughed Clyde, flushing a little, but too wise to pretend density. She had ever found that the best defence against such badinage lay in frankness. "But don't leave me alone with him, Kitty. It might end with his endowing me with his name and worldly goods. 'Mrs. Casey Dunne!' Euphonious, don't you think? I wonder if I should like to hear myself announced in that way?"

Kitty Wade glanced at her narrowly. Clyde's face expressed nothing but laughing amusement.

"Harrison has a high opinion of him," she said. "I believe his father was supposed to be wealthy until after his death, when Mr. Dunne was a boy. And he is very presentable. I think he deserves a great deal of credit."

"So do I," Clyde agreed heartily. "I told Mr. Wade that I was prepared to furnish whatever money was needed for this lawsuit of Mr. Dunne's."

"You did!" exclaimed Mrs. Wade. "Why, Clyde whatever for? How does it concern you?"

And Clyde told her for the first time of her first meeting with Casey Dunne.

"And you never told me!" Kitty Wade commented, as her husband had done. "It's a real romance in real life. But I think you are the most generous girl I ever heard of. If you were in love with him, of course that would explain it. Aren't you, now — a little?"

"I'm not in love with him, Kitty — honestly I'm not," Clyde responded. "I don't know whether I shall ever be or not. He did me a service which I would like to repay. I have more money than I know what to do with. If money would help him over a rough place it was up to me. At least, that's how I looked at it. And as for going out to his country — why, I want to, that's all. I want to see the country which produces that sort of man. He's different from the others, somehow. I don't think he cares whether I have money or not. He wasn't going to recall himself to me till I practically recognized him. I know I'm good-looking and I know he knows it, but I don't think he cares. And he'd never have written me in this world or told me a thing about it himself if I hadn't written him first and asked him to."

"Why, Clyde!" Kitty Wade exclaimed in amazement.

"That's exactly what I did," Clyde asseverated. "If I were in love with him that would be the last thing I'd own up to, wouldn't it? Heavens above! Kitty, I know it's unmaidenly by all the old standards. You're married; you have your husband and your home and your interests. I have none of these things. You can't realize how utterly purposeless and idle and empty my life is. Just killing time. That was well enough a few years ago, and I enjoyed it. But now I'm as old as you are. I want something different from the daily and yearly round of sameness. If I were a man I'd work sixteen hours a day. If I had any special talent I'd cultivate it. But I haven't. I'm just an ordinary rich girl, in danger of physical and mental stagnation — in danger of marrying some equally rich man whom I don't love, in order to provide myself with new interests."

"Casey Dunne is a new interest, I suppose," said Kitty Wade dryly.

"I wish you wouldn't, Kitty," said Clyde.

"Then I won't," said Kitty Wade, "for I think you believe what you say. Which," she added to herself, "is more than I do, young lady."

CHAPTER XVI

ON ALL the ranches along the Coldstream there was water in plenty. The ditches ran brimful. In the fields the soil was dark with grateful moisture; the roots of the grain drank deep, fed full on the stored fertility of ages magically released by the water, and shot suddenly from small, frail plants, apparently lying thinly in the drills, into crowding, lusty growths, vigorous, strong-stemmed, robust, throwing millions of green pennants to the warm winds. Down the length of the fields at narrow intervals trickled little streams like liquid silver wires strung against a background of living emerald. Pullulation was forced, swift, marvellous; one could almost hear the grain grow.

Though everything pointed to a bumper crop, this depended on a continued water supply, and the ranchers took full advantage of the present, for none could tell how long the conditions would endure. As soon as one piece of land had sufficient moisture the water was shifted elsewhere; they allowed no overflow, no waste. This meant long hours, continuous, if not arduous work.

Naturally each ranch's main ditch was the heart

of its water supply. From these, smaller ditches carried the supply to the different fields. These represented the arteries. The small streams trickling down the long irrigation marks through the grain and root crops might be likened to veins. To supply these it was necessary to tap the arteries every few yards; and the adjustment of these outlets, as ditches always lower during the heat of the day when suction and evaporation are the greatest and rise in the cooler hours of the night, was a matter of some skill and difficulty.

Dunne and his entire force worked overtime, taking all they could get while they could get it. Glass, the timorous would-be investor, paid him several visits. The first time Casey himself showed him over the ranch, explaining the theory and practice of irrigation, telling him what crops could be grown, what could not be grown, and what might perhaps be grown but as yet had not been proven. Glass absorbed this information like a sponge. Once more he recited his doubts and fears, going over the same ground with wearying detail. Casey, on the second visit, handed him over to Tom McHale, who listened pityingly.

"This here Glass sure needs a guardian or a nursemaid or something," he told Casey afterward. "He don't seem to know which way to string his chips. He makes me that tired I sorter suggests maybe he'd better pray about it; and he says he's done that,

too, but don't seem to git no straight answer. So I tells him if the Lord don't know I surely don't. And then he says he'll ask his wife. His wife! Whatever do you think of that? I quit him right there!"

But Glass wandered from ranch to ranch, a harmless bore, relating his perplexities to people too busy to listen. Finally he announced that he had bought land and sent for his family. And on the strength of this began his rounds again, eager for agricultural information.

At this time Casey received a letter from Wade giving the date of his long-promised visit to Coldstream. He added that his wife and Miss Burnaby would accompany him. They would stay, he said, in town, at the hotel. Immediately Casey went into committee with Tom McHale.

"Wade was coming here," he said. "The ladies complicate matters, but we'll have to do the best we can. It's the house that worries me. It's not furnished the way I'd like to have it. And then it's small. I guess we'll have to move out, Tom."

"Sure," McHale agreed at once. "We can bed down anywheres. I'll rig up a couple of bunks in the new tool house. We're pretty well along with the water. I can 'tend to that while you show 'em the country."

Straightway Casey commanded Feng, his Chinaman, to clean and scrub, much to that Celestial's disgust.

"What foh?" he demanded. "Housee plenty clean. Las spling me *hiyu* sclub, *hiyu* wash, *hiyu* sweep undeh bed. All light now."

"All right for man; no good for woman," Casey explained. "Two lady come stop, Feng."

"Ho!" said Feng, adjusting his mind to a new situation. "You and Tom mally him?"

"No," Casey responded. "One married already. Ladies all same my friends, Feng."

"No good." Feng announced with certainty. "Woman fliend no good. All time makee too much wo'k. All time kick at glub. Mebbyso want blekfust in bed. Mebbyso bling baby. Neveh give Chinaboy a dolla'. No good. S'pose you bling woman fliend me quit. Me go back to China."

"If you quit me now, one dead China boy stop," Casey threatened. He added craftily: "This lady *tyee* lady. All same mandarin's daughter. *Hiyu* rich!"

"Ho!" said Feng thoughtfully. "*Hiyu* lich, eh? All light. Me clean housee."

But, though he had won this diplomatic victory, Casey was not satisfied. Finally he took his perplexities to Sheila, enlisting her aid in problems of decoration and the like.

"Where does this Miss Burnaby come in?" she asked. "Who is she?"

Casey told her, and she frowned dubiously.

"Seems to me you butted into real society when

you went outside, Casey. If she has all that money she's apt to be pernickity. I hate fussy women. Is she pretty?"

"Why — yes, I think so," he admitted. "Oh, yes, she's pretty — no doubt about that. But I don't think she's fussy. You'll like her, Sheila. She doesn't scare or rattle easily. In some ways she reminds me of you."

"Thank you. And how do you know she doesn't scare or rattle?"

He evaded the question. "I don't think she would."

"Why didn't you ever mention her before?"

"Never thought of it. I hadn't the least notion that Mrs. Wade was coming, let alone Miss Burnaby. You see, it puts me up against it. I'll be ever so much obliged if you'll help me out."

"I'll come over and arrange things in the rooms, of course," Sheila acquiesced.

And so, when Casey awaited the coming of the train which bore his guests, it was with the knowledge that his rough-and-tumble, quarters had been made as presentable as possible.

Wade and his party descended, attended by an obsequious porter laden with bags, and in a moment Casey was shaking hands.

"And so this is your country!" said Mrs. Wade eying her surroundings rather dubiously. In her heart she was appalled at the prospect of passing several weeks in such a place.

"Well, some of it isn't mine," he laughed. "I wish it were. This is only the makings, Mrs. Wade. Wait a few years. Now, here's what we do. We have dinner at the hotel. Afterward we drive out to the ranch where you are all to stay."

Wade and his wife protested. They couldn't think of it. Clyde said nothing. Casey appealed to her.

"What do you say Miss Burnaby? Will you brave the discomforts of a shack in the dry belt?"

"I'm in the hands of my friends," she laughed.

"That includes me," said Casey. "Everything's fixed for you. This is my stamping ground, and I'm boss. What I say goes." He introduced Mr. Quilty, who was hovering in the background, and chuckled as that garrulous gentleman proceeded to unwind an apparently endless welcome.

"I like him," Clyde whispered.

"Pure gold," said Casey, and created a diversion. He helped Quilty deposit the bags in the station.

"Thon's a fine gyurrl," said the latter, with a jerk of his thumb toward the platform."

"Right," Casey replied.

"Oh, trust a quiet devil like yourself to pick wan out," said the little station agent. "I was the same meself, whin I was more younger nor what I am now. I fell dead in love with a fine, big gyurrl be th' name iv — iv — dom'd if I don't forget the name iv her, onless it was Mary or Josephine — no, thim came

afther. What th' divil are ye laughin' at? Annyways, me an' this gyurrl that I loved that I forget the name iv, was strollin' wan night be moonlight, d'ye see me, now? And we come to where there was a stump risin' maybe two fut clear iv th' ground — ye'll wonder what th' stump had to do wid ut, but listen — and I stopped and put me arrm around her waist — or tried to; for a fine circumferenshus waist she had. Faix, a wan-arrmed man'd've been up against it intirely wid her — and I sez to her, 'Lena' — that was her name, Lena, I remimber now, and she was a Swede — 'Lena,' I sez, 'luk at the moon!' 'Ay see him,' she sez. 'Turn yer sweet face a little more to the southeast,' I sez, that bein' to'rd the stump I mintioned before; an' when I had her at the right angle I made a lep up on the stump and kissed her. Faix, and the same was a forced play, me bein' the height I am, and her over six fut. 'I love yez,' I sez; 'say yez love me!'"

"Well, what did she say?" asked Casey, as Mr. Quilty paused for breath.

"She concealed her feelin's," Mr. Quilty replied sadly. "She said, 'Ay tenk ve go home now. Ay don't vant no feller vat have to mek love med a step-ladder!' And afther that, mind ye, what does she do but take up wid another little divil wid no legs at all, havin' lost them under a shuntin' ingin. But his artfulness is such that he gets extra-long imitation wans, like stilts, to do his coortin' on. An', though

he looks like a cross bechune a sparrow and a crane and has to carry an oil can when he walks or else creak like a stable door in Janooary, she marries him and keeps him in luxury be takin' in washin' for the camps. And so, ye see, though I had stood on wan stump to kiss her, ivery time he done the likes he had to stand on *two!*"

"Corney," said Casey gravely, "you are an awful liar."

"I will not be insulted by yez," Mr. Quilty retorted with equal gravity. "I will consider the soorce from which ut comes. G'wan out of here, before I do yez injury."

Immediately after dinner Casey brought up his road team, two wiry, slashing chestnuts. The Wades occupied the rear seat. Clyde sat beside Casey. The horses started with a rush that brought a gasp from Mrs. Wade. Clyde involuntarily caught the seat rail.

"It's all right," Casey assured them. "A little fresh, that's all. They know they're going home. It's their way of saying they're glad. You, Dick — you, Doc! Behave, behave!" He had them in hand, checking their impatience to an easy jog, holding them fretting against the bit. "I'll let them out in a mile or two. Do you know horses, Miss Burnaby?"

"A very little. I ride and drive; but I like quiet animals."

"Oh, these are quiet." He smiled back at Mrs. Wade.

"Are they?" that lady commented. "Then I don't want to drive behind wild ones."

A light wind was in their faces, blowing the dust backward. The town vanished suddenly, lost behind swells of brown grasses. The road wound tortuously onward, skirting little groves of cottonwoods, swinging along gulches, sometimes plunging down them and ascending in long grades on the thither side.

Clyde drank in the sweet, thin air eagerly. The city and her everyday life seemed far behind. Heretofore her holidays had been passed in places where pleasure was a business. This was to be different. She would not look for amusement; she would let it come to her. She felt that she was entering a world of which she knew little, peopled by those whose outlook was strange. It seemed, somehow, that this journey was to be fateful — that she had placed herself in the grip of circumstances which moved her without volition. Where and how, she wondered vaguely, would it end?

She glanced at Dunne's profile, shaded by the hat brim tilted over his eyes against the sun; at his buckskin-gloved hands holding the reins against the steady pull of the big chestnuts; downward over the dashboard at their hoofs falling with the forceful impact of hammers and yet rising with the light springiness of

an athlete's foot, throwing the miles behind them scornfully. And she was dreamily content.

"You're going to like it," said Dunne suddenly.

"Am I?" she smiled. "How do you know? How did you know?"

"It's largely a guess. I was nervous at first."

"And now?"

"No. This is a plain, dusty trail, the grass is so dry it's almost dead, the scenery is conspicuously absent, the smell of leather and horseflesh isn't especially pleasant — and yet you are not noticing these things. The bigness and the newness of the land have got you, Miss Burnaby. You don't know it and you can't put it into words — I can't myself — but the feeling is there. You are one of us at heart."

"Of 'us'?"

"The people of the new lands — the pioneers, if you choose, the modern colonists, the trail blazers."

"I wonder." The idea was new. She considered it gravely. "My parents were city folks; I have lived in the city all my life. And yet I think I have the feeling you speak of. Only I can't put it into words either."

"If you could you would be the most famous person in the world. The song is there, waiting the singer. It has always been there, waiting, and the singer has never come. We who hear it in our hearts have no voices. Now and then some genius

strikes the chord by accident, almost, and loses it. I don't think any one will ever find it completely. But if some one should! Heavens! What a grand harmony it would be."

She glanced at him curiously. He was not looking at her. His eyes were on a little cloud, a white island in a sapphire sea. He seemed to be paying no attention whatever to the road, to his surroundings. But as one of the chestnuts stumbled over a loose stone he lifted him instantly with the reins and administered a sharp word of reproof and a light cut of the whip.

"He didn't mean to stumble," said Clyde.

"He should have meant not to. A horse that isn't tired and is paying attention to business should never stumble on a road. It's the slouchy horse that breaks his kind owner's neck some day. Now I'm going to let them out."

So far as Clyde could observe, he did absolutely nothing. But immediately, as though some subtle current had passed from his hands along the lines, the horses' heads came up, their ears pricked forward, their stride quickened and lengthened, and the measured beat of their hoofs became a quickstep. The horses themselves seemed to exult in the change of pace, filling their great lungs through widened nostrils and expelling the air noisily, shaking their heads, proud of themselves and their work.

Mrs. Wade laid a nervous hand on her husband's

arm as the light wagon rattled down a descent. But Clyde sat quietly, her lips slightly parted, her eyes shining as the warm wind poured past in a torrent plucking at vagrant strands of her coppery golden hair.

"Fifteen miles an hour," said Casey. "Like it?"

"It's better than fifty in a car," she replied.

"The difference between God-made and man-made horsepower. Some people can't appreciate it."

"I can. It isn't the end — the pace alone. It's the means to the end."

"Plus the love of human flesh and blood for other flesh and blood. You've got it. I won't keep them at this. Too warm."

It was late afternoon when Chakchak came into view. It appeared suddenly as they swung around the corner of a butte, lying below them, the emerald of its fields drenched with the gold of the sloping sun.

"My kingdom!" said Casey. "Welcome to it!"

Clyde was surprised, in a measure disappointed. She had pictured it differently. With her the word "ranch" had connoted large prairie areas, bald landscapes, herds of cattle, lonely horsemen, buildings more or less ugly, unrelieved by any special surroundings. Here were green fields, trees, water, painted barns, and a neat little house of the bungalow type.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it's a farm!"

"Thank you," he responded; "that's what we're

trying to make it. Only out here we call them 'ranches.' Slightly more picturesque term, glorified by fiction, calculated to appeal to the imagination. Gives the impression of a free, breezy life in which the horse does all the work. Invaluable in selling land. But in strict confidence I may say that work on a farm in the East and on a ranch in the West are wins — you can't tell t'other from which."

McHale appeared as they drove up, to relieve Casey of the horses. He was freshly shaven, and dressed with unusual care. Feng, in white jacket and apron, grinned from his quarters, appraising the "*hiyu* lich gal," with an eye to possible dollars.

"Now, this house," Casey explained, as they entered, "belongs to you three. It's yours to have, hold, and occupy for your sole use and benefit while you are here. Is that sufficiently legal, Wade? The Chinaman is yours, too. He takes his orders from you. Mrs. Wade, your room is there. Miss Burnaby, that one is intended for you. But if you like to change about, do so, by all means."

"And which is your room?" Wade asked.

"I'm bunking in one of the other buildings."

"What? We're putting you out of your own house!" Wade exclaimed. "That won't do, Casey, really it won't. We won't let you."

"Of course not," his wife concurred.

"Indeed we won't," said Clyde.

But Casey was firm. He explained that he came

and went at all hours, rose early, had to be where he could confer with McHale. He insisted on his fictions, and ended by half convincing them.

Clyde, entering the room he had pointed out as hers, was struck by its absolute cleanness and daintiness. The curtains were tastefully draped, tied with ribbon; there were scarfs on dresser and stand, pincushion and pins, little trays for trifles. The bed was made with hospital neatness.

A moment afterward Kitty Wade entered, looking around.

"Yours, too," she said. "No mere bachelor ever did these things, Clyde. The Chinaman is out of the question. It is to find the woman."

"We'll ask Mr. Dunne," said Clyde.

But it was not till after dinner that Kitty Wade did so.

"Miss McCrae was kind enough to fix up the rooms for you," Casey replied.

"Who is Miss McCrae?"

Casey pulled a handful of photographs from a drawer, and shuffled them. He handed one to Mrs. Wade.

"That's Sheila McCrae. I'll drive you over to Talapus, her father's place, one of these days."

Clyde, moved by an interest which she could not understand, bent over Kitty Wade's shoulder. The picture was an enlarged snapshot, but a splendid likeness. Sheila was standing, one hand by her

side holding her riding hat, the other, half raised to her hair, as if to arrange it when the shutter had opened. Her dark, keen face with its touch of wistfulness looked full at them.

"What a nice-looking girl!" Kitty Wade exclaimed. "Don't you think so, Clyde?"

Clyde agreed perfunctorily. But, looking into the steady, fearless eyes of the pictured girl, she felt a vague, incomprehensible hostility. Kitty Wade glanced at her quickly, detecting the strained note. Clyde felt the glance, and inwardly resented it. Kitty Wade's eyes were altogether too observant.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Clyde awoke next morning she lay for some time in dreamy content. She was deliciously rested. The cold, clear, early morning air pouring in through the open window beneath the partially drawn blind was like an invigorating draught. Outside, beyond the shade of the veranda, she could see sunlight. Somewhere a horse whinnied. In the house she could hear an occasional rattle of dishes. She rose and dressed, humming a song. She felt strangely happy, as though she had attained a long-sought goal. Life that morning seemed to take on a new meaning to her; to be sweeter and cleaner, good in itself, a thing to rejoice in. The very air she breathed seemed charged with the indistinguishable odours of growing things, as it might strike the unspoiled, sensitive nostrils of a child. She felt a child's joy in merely being.

"How well you are looking, Clyde," said Kitty Wade, as she entered the breakfast room.

"Positively blooming," said Wade.

"Positively bloomin' hungry," laughed Clyde. "I haven't had such an appetite since I left boarding school."

"God save all here!" said Casey, from the door. "How did you sleep? No need to ask you ladies, and it doesn't matter about Wade. Hey, you, Feng! You catch breakfast quick!"

During the meal they made plans for the day. In the morning Casey was going to shift the water to his oats; in the afternoon he would drive them over to Talapus. They would have supper there, and return by moonlight. Meanwhile they were to consider the place theirs, to go where and do what they liked.

"I'll help you," Wade offered.

"We'll all help you," said Clyde.

"I can rig Wade out for irrigating," Casey replied, "but not you ladies. It's too muddy a job for you."

"But I should like to see how it is done," said Clyde.

She had her way, and accompanied them to the field, watching the turning of the water down the rows, the careful adjustment of its flow, and the progress of the streams. In spite of her care she became wet and muddy — and enjoyed herself the more.

"I told you so," said Casey. "No sympathy, Miss Burnaby."

"I don't want it. I'm enjoying myself. I'd like to play in the water, to sail sticks down the ditch, and pretend that they were boats."

"Shocking!" he laughed. "But I'd like to play with you."

"Nice pair of kids you are," Wade commented. He was perspiring from unaccustomed exertion. "'Pon my soul, though, I feel the same. To think of me messing away my life in a tenth-story office worrying about other people's business and quarrels! What do you keep in this air, Casey? Old Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth?"

"I keep some very fair Scotch in a cupboard at the house," Casey responded. "The water is all right now. Suppose we adjourn."

"I'll go you once," said Wade.

"Where do I come in?" Clyde asked. "I'm thirsty, too."

"Feng shall produce Chakchak fizzes for both of us."

They trooped into the house, thirsty, hungry, and laughing, and Kitty Wade exclaimed at Clyde's dress.

"Thank Heaven I didn't go!" she cried. "Mr. Dunne, you should get a commission from her dressmaker."

"Oh, this will wash. And I'm so beautifully hungry and thirsty."

"Thirsty! With all that water?" said Kitty Wade.

"What's water got to do with real thirst?" her husband demanded. "Come on, Casey; don't muz-

zle the ox, you know. Produce that Wonderful Remedy from the Land o' Cakes. It was oats we were irrigating, wasn't it? Very appropriate. Here's to Oats — oatmeal, rolled oats, wild oats, and Titus Oates. 'Tak' a wee bit drappie ——'"

"Whatever has got into you?" his wife demanded.

"I feel like a pup off a chain," Wade admitted.

After dinner Clyde went to her room to prepare for the drive to Talapus. She inspected her limited wardrobe thoughtfully, finally selecting the plainest and most unpretentious attire in her possession; so that when she took a last look in the mirror she saw a girl wearing a panama hat, a white shirtwaist, and a tweed golf skirt. Kitty Wade, rather more elaborately costumed, eyed her critically

"Oh, bother!" she said. "This isn't fair. You make me feel all dressed up, but it's too much trouble to change."

"I looked at it the other way — it was too much trouble to dress up," Clyde replied. "I don't suppose one needs to, out here. I'm going to be comfy, anyway."

Kitty Wade forebore comment, but she smiled wisely to herself. Inwardly she reflected that simplicity of dress was Clyde's long suit. With her hair, complexion, and figure the less fussiness there was to distract the eye the better. And Mrs. Wade was inclined to attribute to the fortunate owner of these things a perfect knowledge of this fact.

Mrs. Wade had the front seat, beside Casey, while Clyde sat with Wade. Clyde experienced a distinct feeling of disappointment. Wade was a good companion and a good friend, *but* — and the "but" was a big one.

She found herself listening to Casey's voice, watching the set of his shoulders, noting the deep, living bronze of his skin. From time to time he turned, including them in the conversation, pointing out things of interest to Wade. But nevertheless she did not enjoy the drive.

"I sent word that we were coming," said Casey, as they sighted the ranch. "That was in the interests of the ladies mostly."

"Of course," Wade agreed. "Women always like people to find them all togged up, as if they never did a day's work in their lives. I catch it from Kitty if I bring any one home with me without due notice. If women only knew how much better they look in ordinary clothes!"

Kitty Wade, turning her head to retort, surprised a quiet, enigmatic smile on Clyde's face. Their eyes met, and keen question and defiant answer leaped across the glance. Kitty Wade let the retort remain unspoken, and contemplated the nigh chestnut's ears, for her husband's last words had given her a clew.

"Oh, Clyde Burnaby, Clyde Burnaby!" she said to herself with a little shake of the head. "Now I

know. What a deep finesse! You think that this McCrae girl will put on her best country-maid — or country-made — finery; and you, in your studied simplicity, will show the better by contrast — to the masculine eye, at least. I give you full credit, my dear. Not one woman in a thousand would have thought of it. *I* shouldn't, and I know men better than you do. But why did you do it? Are you *jealous* of a girl you've never seen? And does that mean you care — seriously care — for our pleasant but likely impecunious Mr. Dunne?"

She was still puzzling over this problem when they drove up to the house. Donald McCrae and his wife welcomed them, and he and Casey took the team to the stable. But as the others reached the welcome shade of the veranda Sheila emerged from the house and came forward. At sight of her Kitty Wade smiled to herself.

For Sheila had not donned finery. She was clad in simple white, unrelieved by any touch of colour. Not a ring adorned her slim, brown hands. Her masses of glistening, brown hair were dressed low on her head, giving an effect almost girlish, softening the keenness of her face. She was as composed, as dignified, as essentially ladylike as Clyde herself.

Clyde thanked her gracefully for the arrangement of their rooms. It was very good of her to take such trouble for strangers.

"Oh, but I'm afraid I did that for Casey, and not for the strangers," laughed Sheila. "I hope old Feng didn't undo my work. He thought I was butting in. Anyway, Casey would have seen that you were comfortable, though some of his ideas of domestic arrangements are masculine, to say the least of them." She told the story of the hen, and set them laughing.

Later Casey, having stabled the horses, came up with McCrae. "Well, Sheila, what's the good word?" he asked. "What yarns have you been telling Miss Burnaby?"

"I was telling her of your poultry system."

"Miss McCrae has been suggesting all sorts of things for our amusement," said Clyde; "from a dance to riding lessons."

"I didn't say a word about lessons," Sheila protested.

"But I need them," Clyde admitted. "I never pretend to know what I don't know."

"Sheila can give most men lessons," said Casey. "The only objection I have is that I intended to instruct you myself."

Clyde laughed. "Which offer shall I accept?"

"Casey's," said Sheila promptly. "I won't be selfish. Besides, educational statistics prove that we women imbibe knowledge faster from men than from each other."

Clyde darted a swift glance at her. But Sheila's

face told nothing. If the words were intended to bear an added meaning she did not show it.

"Statistics are good for something, at last," said Casey.

"Give her Dolly," said Sheila. "Don't let her coax you into letting her try that old brute, Shiner. He's almost an outlaw."

"Love me, love my horse!"

The quotation seemed careless. Sheila's face told Clyde nothing.

"'Like master, like horse' is more appropriate," said Sheila.

"Oh, I'm not an outlaw — yet," he said, with just the slightest pause before the word.

Slight though it was, Clyde noticed it; noticed, too, the instant shadow on Sheila's face, the quick contraction of her dark brows, the momentary silence, transient but utter. It was as if the chill and gloom of night had suddenly struck the summer's noonday.

But in a moment the conversation was resumed, and became general. Sandy McCrae joined them, silent as usual, but evidently attracted by Clyde. Presently Sheila took Casey to diagnose the case of a favourite, sick collie.

"My heavens, Casey, did you see the kid?" she asked. "I never knew him to look twice at a girl before."

"Every boy has to start some time," he laughed. "She's well worth looking at."

"That's so. Yes, she's very pretty, Casey."

"I'm glad you like her."

It was on the tip of her tongue to disclaim, but she checked herself. "She's different from what I expected. No airs. And she *looks* sensible. Is she?"

"I think so."

"Yes, I think so, too. She dresses very simply. I was prepared to be reduced to a condition of helpless feminine envy by her clothes. As it is, I feel quite of the same clay."

"You don't need to envy anybody's clothes. That white dress looks good to me. I never saw you looking better."

The rich blood crept up under her tanned cheeks. Such compliments were rare in her life. Casey himself seldom paid them. Frank friendship was very well; but now and then, womanlike, she longed for such current coin of courtesy.

"Really, Casey?"

"Of course," he assured her. "You know how to wear clothes. And you know you look particularly well in white. I've told you so before."

"Once."

"Half a dozen times."

"No — once. I remember it very well, because you don't often notice what I have on. Perhaps that's lucky, too."

"If it's you in the clothes, that's good enough."

"That's just the trouble. You accept me as part of the everyday scenery. I might wear a blanket, for all you'd care."

"I've seen some mighty becoming blanket costumes."

"I'm not a *klootch*," she flashed. "I'm a white woman, and when I wear a becoming dress I like somebody to tell me so."

"And didn't I just tell you?"

"So you did — and I'll put a ring around the date. It's the first time you've condescended to pay me a compliment in a year. You men are the limit. You take it as a matter of course that a girl should be neat and spick and span. If she wasn't you'd notice it soon enough. It's easy for a girl like this Miss Burnaby. I don't suppose she ever did a day's work or anything useful in her life. She orders her clothes from the best places, and gets them fitted and sent home, and that's all there is to it. But how about me? I've got a hundred things to attend to every day. I've got to make my own clothes, or take a long chance on a mail-order house. That's why, when I do get anything that looks passable, I like it to be noticed."

"That's so," he admitted. "That's natural. I never thought of it, Sheila, and that's the truth. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Oh, heavens! Casey, I'm sorry I did now. Why do men have to be *told?* I don't get taken this

way often. Women and dogs have to be thankful for small mercies. Only a dog can shove a cold, wet nose into his master's hand and get a pat and a kind word; but a woman ——"

She broke off, colouring furiously. The red tide surged over cheeks and brow to the roots of her hair. For the first time, with him, she was afraid of being misunderstood.

But Casey's perceptions, fairly acute where men and affairs were concerned, quite failed to grasp the situation. He saw only that Sheila, ordinarily sensible and dependable, had flown off the handle over something, and he metaphorically threw up his hands helplessly at the vagaries of women.

"Well, well, now, never mind," he said, in blundering consolation. "You look well in anything. I've often noticed, but I didn't think you cared for compliments. Anyway" — he grasped eagerly at something safe — "anyway, you can't beat that white dress."

She turned to him again, once more the everyday Sheila.

"All right, old boy, we'll let it go at that. Forget it. And now I'll tell you something: I wore this white dress — absolutely the plainest thing I have — because I didn't want to come into a finery contest with Miss Burnaby. And now let's look at the old dog. I'm afraid he'll have to be shot."

Farwell put in an appearance after supper. It was

plain that the big engineer had not expected to find other guests; also that their presence embarrassed him. Quite unused to dissembling his feelings, he took no pains to hide his dislike for Dunne. Casey, on the other hand, was polite, suave, quiet, wearing the mocking smile that invariably exasperated the engineer.

"You and Mr. Farwell are not friends," Clyde ventured on the way home.

"He doesn't think much of me," Casey admitted. "I rub him the wrong way."

"As you were doing to-night."

"Was I?"

"You know you were. Is there a private quarrel between you, apart from the water matter?"

"Not exactly. But it would come to that if we saw much of each other."

"Then I hope you won't. It's embarrassing to others."

"I'm awfully sorry. It was very bad form, of course. But somehow I couldn't help it."

"Never mind. The McCraes are affected by this water trouble, aren't they?"

"As much as I am. You are surprised that Farwell goes there. I have never mentioned it to them, nor they to me. It's none of my business."

"Nor of mine."

"I didn't mean that."

"I know you didn't. Still, I think I could guess why Mr. Farwell goes to Talapus."

"So could I," said Casey dryly, and the subject dropped.

But Kitty Wade came to Clyde's room for a chat before retiring. "Those McCraes," she said, "are very nice. Mr. McCrae is one of the real pioneers. He told us some of the most interesting things. How did you like Miss McCrae?"

"I think she's a very nice, sensible girl. Good-looking, too."

"H'm!" said Kitty Wade. "Yes, I think she is. Dresses nicely and simply. No imitation fine things. Shows the correct instinct. You and she might have been having a plain-clothes competition."

Clyde did not respond. Kitty Wade resumed, after a brief pause: "I'll tell you one thing, Clyde; this man Farwell is in love with her."

"I could see that, Kitty."

"And she doesn't care for him."

"I thought that, too."

"I wonder," Kitty Wade went on, "if there is anything between her and Mr. Dunne? Do you suppose he and Mr. Farwell are jealous of each other? They were like two dogs with one bone."

Clyde yawned. "Oh, mercy, Kitty," she said wearily, "ask me something easier. I wouldn't blame either of them. She seems to be a thoroughly nice girl."

Kitty Wade on her way to her room nodded wisely. "You don't fool me a little bit, Clyde," she said to herself. "This Sheila McCrae is probably just as nice as you are, and you own up to it like a little lady. But all the same you hate each other; and, what's more, you both know it."

CHAPTER XVIII

CLYDE lay stretched at length in sweet, odorous hay. There was no reason why she should not have taken the hammock in the shade of the veranda that morning, save that she wanted to be alone. Therefore she had taken a book and wandered forth. Behind the corrals she had come upon a haystack, cut halfway down and halfway across, and on impulse she had climbed up a short ladder and lain down. Her hands clasped behind her head, her book forgotten, she stared up into the blue sky, and dreamed daydreams. And then she went to sleep.

She was aroused by the sound of hammering. Peeping over the edge of the stack, she recognized Tom McHale. McHale was putting a strand of wire around the stack, and as she looked he began to sing a ballad of the old frontier. Clyde had never heard "Sam Bass," and she listened to McHale's damaged tenor.

"Sam was born in Indianner, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam;
And first he went to Texas, a cowboy for to be—
He robs the stage at ——"

He stopped abruptly, and Clyde saw two mounted men approaching. They bore down on McHale, who lifted his coat from a rail, and put it on. To Clyde's amazement the action revealed a worn leather holster strapped to the inner side of the garment, and from it protruded the ivory butt of a six-shooter. McHale was apparently unarmed; in reality a weapon lay within instant reach of his hand.

The two horsemen were roughly dressed. Each wore a gun openly at his belt. One was large, sandy-haired, gray-eyed. The other was dark, quick, restless, shooting odd, darting glances from a pair of sinister black eyes.

"Is your name Dunne?" asked the first roughly.

"Dunne?" queried McHale, as if the name were strange to him. "Did you say Dunne, or Doane?"

"I said Dunne."

"Oh," McHale responded. "Lemme think. No, I guess not. I never used that name that I remember of. No, partner, my name ain't Dunne."

"We want Dunne. Where'll we find him?"

"Why, now," said McHale, "that's a right hard question. You might find him one place, and then again you mightn't. I reckon I wouldn't be misleading you none if I was to tell you you'd find him wherever he's at."

"You workin' for him?" the dark man put in quickly.

"I was, a minute ago. Now I got a job with an inquiry office. Anything else I can tell you?"

"No," said the dark man. "But you can tell Dunne that up to a minute ago he had a —— —— fool workin' for him!"

Dead silence while a watch could tick off ten seconds. Clyde scarcely breathed. At different times in her life she had heard noisy quarrels in city streets, quarrels big with oath and threat. This was different. She experienced a sensation as though, even in the bright sunshine beneath the blue, unflecked summer sky where all was instinct with growth and health and life, she were watching a deathbed.

The two strangers sat motionless, their eyes on McHale, their right hands resting quietly by their waists. McHale stood equally still, facing them, his eyes narrowed down to slits, his left hand holding the lapel of his coat, his right hand, a half-smoked cigarette between the first and second fingers, on a level with his chin. He expelled a thin stream of smoke from his lungs, and spoke:

"I reckon you can tell him yourself. Here he come now."

The eyes of the first man never shifted. The other instantly looked over his shoulder. McHale laughed.

"You're an old-timer," he said to the gray-eyed man; "but him" — he jerked a contemptuous thumb at the second — "it's a wonder to me he ever growed up. Don't you do it no more, friend. Don't you

never take your eyes off a man you've called a ——— fool, or maybe the next thing they beholds is the Promised Land!"

But his words had not been intended as a ruse. Casey was riding over on his little gray mare to see who the strangers were, and what they wanted.

"This man tells me you're Dunne," said the gray-eyed man.

"That's correct," Casey admitted.

"My name is Dade; his name is Cross." He indicated his companion by a sidewise nod. "We've bought land from this here irrigation outfit. So have half a dozen other men, friends of ours. Now we can't get water."

"Well?"

"Well, the company puts it up that some of you fellows is to blame. You've cut the ditches so they won't carry. We've come to tell you that this has got to stop."

"That's kind of you, anyway," Casey observed quietly. He and Dade eyed each other appraisingly.

"What I want to make plumb clear," said the latter, "is that this don't go no more. It's no good. You'll leave the ditches alone, or else ——"

"Or else?" Casey suggested.

"Or else we'll make you," said Dade grimly. "We want water, and we'll have it."

"I wonder," said Casey, "if you are trying to hang a nice little bluff on me, Mr. Dade? Suppose,

for instance, you have no land, and don't need any water."

"I can show you my deed."

"That's quite possible. All right, Mr. Wade. Is there anything more you want to say?"

"I reckon that's all," said Dade. "If you'll say that the ditches will be let alone there'll be no trouble; if not, there will be."

"What kind of trouble, Mr. Dade?"

"You'll see when it comes."

"Very well," said Casey. "Now, listen to me, Mr. Dade. You and your friend there and your whole outfit can go plumb. Get that? Every ranch here has water, and we're going to keep it. How we keep it is our own business. If you've bought land you may look to the company for water, and not to us. If you haven't bought land — if you're hired to come here to start something — why, let it start!"

He and Dade looked straight into each other's eyes in the silence that followed. Cross made a sudden movement.

"Be careful, partner!" McHale warned him in hard tones.

Once more Clyde, an involuntary listener, felt the presence of a crisis, the chill of fate impending. But, as before, it passed.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," said Dade. "Nothing starts — now. Better remember what I told you. Come on, Sam, we'll get going."

Clyde heard the trample of hoofs dying in the distance, and then McHale's voice:

"You run the bluff, but you took an awful chance. That there Cross come mighty close to making a break."

"Nervous kind?"

"Yep. He's apt to be too blamed soon. T'other one, Dade, is cold-drawn. I judge he's bad. Ever hear of him?"

"No."

"Nor me," said McHale; "but he has the earmarks."

Casey's reply was lost as they turned away. Clyde waited until they were out of sight, and then descended. The morning adventure had given her food for thought. Until then she had been deceived by the smooth current of life at Chakchak. It had seemed an idyllic, carefree existence. Although she had known of the trouble, it had seemed far in the background; it was a skeleton which had not obtruded itself. Now, by accident, she had surprised it stalking abroad in the glare of day.

That afternoon she and Casey rode together. He was in his usual spirits, laughing, joking, full of whimsical good humour. But back of it she thought she detected a preoccupation. Occasionally he would be silent and his eyes would narrow as if he were working out some problem.

Far up beneath the shoulder of a butte a little

spring of delicious water bubbled from the gravelly soil, trickled a few hundred yards, and disappeared. It was hidden by willow and cottonwood, draped with greenery, an oasis. Here they dismounted, drank the sweet spring water, watered the horses, and rested. Clyde sat down, leaning against a convenient tree. Casey stretched himself against another, his hands clasped behind his head, a long, thin cigar clenched between his teeth.

Through the fragrant smoke he eyed his companion in lazy content, noting how the mottled sunlight, filtering through the leaves, touched her glorious hair to living, coppery gold.

"Did you ever have your picture painted?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, no," she replied. "Whatever made you think of that?"

"Your hair and the sunlight on it. If I were a painter I should like to paint you now — and keep the picture."

"The first compliment you have ever paid me," she laughed, pleased nevertheless. "I shall remember it."

"And that's a compliment to me," he responded. "Funny what we recollect and what we don't. There doesn't seem to be any rule for it. But I think I shall always remember just how you look at this moment."

"That's very nice."

"I wonder if I may ask you something without offending you?"

"I don't think you would ask anything that should offend me."

"Thanks! It's this: I want to make things pleasant for you all. I've been wondering in my own mind why you came here. You won't misunderstand me. But why?"

"Have you forgotten your invitation?"

"No. But its acceptance was an unexpected piece of luck. There isn't much here to amuse you. What's the real reason?"

She looked full at him, and then dropped her eyes; her fingers plucked blades of grass and cast them aside.

"I don't think I know the answer," she replied at last. "For one thing, I thought I might help you — if you'd let me."

"Help me! How?"

"With money. You and the others."

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "Whatever put that in your head?"

"The only letter you ever wrote me. I could read between the lines. Afterward Mr. Wade told me more. But he wouldn't take what I offered."

"I should say not — if you offered money. He was right."

"Do you mean that you wouldn't let me help you if you needed money?"

"Certainly I wouldn't."

"Because I'm a woman, I suppose."

"Partly. But I wouldn't let any one throw money away on what is apt to be a losing game."

"You think it that?"

"Size it up for yourself. You talked with Wade. Didn't he tell you so?"

"Practically, yes."

"Then you see! It wouldn't do at all."

"But it's my money. I can afford to lose it. I'll not have a pleasure or a luxury the less. And this is my pleasure. Would you refuse me this one thing? You lent *me* money!"

"Ten dollars — pshaw! This is different. I'm more grateful than I can tell you. But there's no necessity — just yet, anyway."

"Then I won't consider it a definite refusal. That was one reason why I came. And then I wanted to see your country. I wanted something new. I can't explain it very well. I had to come; something made me."

She flushed, but the eyes that met his inquiring gaze were entirely steady.

"Something made me. If the Wades had not been coming I should have come alone. I'm frank with you, you see."

"Yes, I understand the feeling," Casey said. "I have had it myself. I've had to get out of old surroundings sometimes. And I've always gone.

Sometimes it has turned out well; sometimes not."

"We shall see how this turns out," she said, with a nod and a little laugh. "I've a feeling that I shall bring you luck."

"I believe you will," he agreed. "We'll say so, anyway. Just now I wouldn't trade places with any man on earth."

She laughed in pure pleasure, bending toward him. "I appropriate that to myself. Don't dare to explain it. Do you come here often?"

"Not very often. That maze of coulée and butte you see is a good cattle range. I come this way looking for strays. The last time I was here Sheila McCrae was with me."

Suddenly, for Clyde, the sunlight lost its golden charm. In an altered tone she said:

"Indeed!" And she added deliberately: "I don't think I ever met a nicer girl than Miss McCrae."

"No nicer anywhere," he agreed heartily. "Well, perhaps we'd better be moving. We have a long ride yet."

Their way led by devious cattle trails along the coulées, over ridges, into other coulées. Clyde lost all idea of direction, but her companion was never at a loss, and finally they emerged upon a broad, well-travelled trail. Then Clyde, after much inward debate, told Casey of her presence that morning at the interview with Dade and Cross.

"Well, they're quite a pair," said Casey. "They came to run some sort of a bluff, but concluded not to push it to a show-down. They'll make trouble for us, I suppose. They're simply hired men, and that's their job."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I wish I knew," he replied, shaking his head.

"Is it all worth while?" she asked. "I haven't asked a question about the blown-up dam and the cut ditches. I'm not going to. But where will it end? You admit that there may be violence — even bloodshed. Why not avoid it?"

"How?"

"By letting the courts settle it."

"If we could have our water till then, that's what we'd do. As it is — well, I'm afraid we can't afford to."

"I've already offered ——"

"I know, I know," he interrupted; "but that's out of the question."

That evening dragged. There were long silences. Nobody seemed inclined to talk. Wade went to sleep in his chair, his cigar dropping from his relaxing fingers. He grumbled when his wife woke him.

"I'm dead sleepy. I'm going to bed. I'm too sleepy to care whether it's polite or not; I'm all in."

"So am I," said Kitty, yawning frankly. "I shall follow my lord and master."

"And I my amiable chaperon," said Clyde.

"I'm afraid all I have to follow is an example," said Casey. He came close to her in the moonlight. "Perhaps I seemed ungrateful this afternoon. I didn't mean to be. I can't tell you how much I appreciated your offer, your generosity; none the less because I can't possibly accept it."

"It is nothing," she said. "It is not even generosity. Real generosity must cost something in renunciation."

"No," he replied; "the cost has little to do with it. It is the spirit of the offer that counts. Don't belittle it."

"It cost me something to make the offer," she said impulsively. "The money would have been the least part of it."

"I don't think I understand."

"I'm glad you don't; and I can't explain now. Some day, perhaps. And now — good night."

He took her hand and looked down into her eyes. He could feel the hand tremble slightly, but the eyes were steady. Darkened by the moonlight they seemed unfathomable pools, deep, mysterious, holding something which he could almost but not quite discern. In the pale light her face lost colour. It was idealized, purified, the face of a dream. Her marvellous crown of hair shone strand by strand as of twisted gold; it shimmered with halolike glory. Her slightly parted lips, vivid against the white of the face, seemed to invite him.

He bent forward, and plucked himself angrily back from the temptation. She released her hand.

"Good night," she said softly.

"Good night," he responded, hesitated, and turned away to his own quarters.

But as Clyde sought her room she seemed to walk on air. She trembled in every fibre of her strong, young body, but her blood sang in her veins. The woman within her called aloud triumphantly. It was long before she slept, and when she did so her slumber was a procession of dreams.

She awoke somewhere in the night, with a strange sound in her ears, a detonation distant but thunderous. She rose, went to the window, and peered out.

As she stood, she commanded a view of Casey Dunne's quarters. The door opened, and two men emerged, running for the stables. It seemed not a minute till two horses were led out, ready saddled. The two men went up instantly. They tore past her window in a flurry of hoofs. She recognized Casey Dunne and McHale. Neither was completely dressed. But around the waist of each was a holster-weighted belt, and across each saddle was slanted a rifle. Because of these warlike manifestations Clyde slept no more that night.

CHAPTER XIX

AS THE night air vibrated with the first explosion Casey Dunne and McHale leaped from their beds, and rushed for the door, opened it, and stood listening. There they heard another and another.

"Dynamite!" cried McHale, reaching for his clothes. "I'll bet it's our dam. Jump into some pants, Casey. There's just a chance to get a sight of somebody."

They threw on clothes with furious haste, caught up weapons, and raced for the stables. Their haste communicated itself to their horses, which bolted before the riders were firm in the saddles. Casey, as they tore past the house, thought he caught a glimpse of white at Clyde's window; but just then he had his hands full with Shiner, who was expressing his disapproval of such unseemly hours by an endeavour to accomplish a blind runaway.

Halfway to the river they came upon the first evidence of dynamite in the form of a bit of wrecked fluming. Water poured down a sidehill from a mass of shattered boards and broken, displaced timbers. They scarcely paused to view the ruin, but rode for

the dam. There was no dam. Where it had been, remained only a few forlorn and twisted posts between which the muddied water whispered softly. The work had been very complete. McHale swore into the night.

"Our own medicine! Well, watch us take it. We ain't like boys that can't build a little thing like a dam. Which way do you reckon them fellers went?"

"Try the old ford," said Casey. "It's all chance, anyway."

A mile downstream they came to the ford, where the river for a brief distance had broadened and shallowed. Fresh tracks of one horse led down to the water's edge. On the other side, where they emerged, they were still filled with muddy water.

"That's the cuss that blowed the flume," said McHale. "He's met up with another one or two here. They've gone on downstream, but we sure can't trail them in this light. What do we do?"

"Ride ahead and trust to luck," said Casey. "It's all we can do."

"I guess that's so," McHale agreed. "But if we run up on 'em ——"

He paused abruptly. Out of the distance came the unmistakable sound of a blast, closely followed by a second.

"Another dam!" Casey exclaimed. "That's Oscar's, or Wyndham's. Our own medicine, sure enough!"

"If I can put a gunsight on to one of them fellers I'll fix him so's he won't hold medicine nohow," said McHale savagely. "No use followin' the river. They'll quit it now, and strike for somewheres. Let's take a chance and hike out sorter southeast. It's as good as any other way."

They struck southeast at a steady jog, angling away from the river. The night was absolutely cloudless; the moon, near the full, bathed the landscape in a flood of white light which threw objects into startling relief, but intensified the shadows. Beneath it the land slumbered in a silence broken only by the soft drumming of hoofs. But for an occasional small band of cattle lying quietly on the slopes, it seemed devoid of life.

They rode in silence, but with eyes and ears keenly alert. At the top of each rise they paused to search the surrounding country. Now and then they drew up to listen. But their watchfulness availed nothing.

"Looks like we're out o'luck," McHale observed finally.

"Looks that way," Casey admitted. "All the same, we'll keep going."

"If we happen across 'em," McHale continued, "I s'pose we round 'em up?"

"Of course. But they may take some rounding.'

"Sure! Only I'll tell you, Casey, I'm awful tired of having it put all over me by fellers that ain't got

no license to. Some of these gents that allow they're hard citizens ain't so dog-goned much. I s'pose they figure on us peaceable farmers bein' bluffed out by a hard face and a hostile talk. That's an awful bad bet for 'em to make."

They were approaching a region of broken ground, carved and ridged with coulées and low hills, worthless save for range purposes. There Casey decided that he would turn back. At best it was like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Chance only could serve them. Suddenly McHale checked his horse.

"Listen!" he said sharply.

They were riding by the base of a low hill. At one side the ground sloped away in a shallow depression which marked the head of a coulée. As they sat listening intently the stillness was broken by a hollow, muffled sound, the unmistakable trampling of hoofs. Faint at first, it increased in volume. Plainly, horses were coming up the draw.

Four horsemen came into view. They were riding carelessly, slouching in their saddles. One struck a match to light a pipe. The flame of it showed for an instant above his cupped hands. At a hundred yards they perceived the waiting horsemen, and halted abruptly.

"You there!" Casey hailed. "We want to talk to you!"

A vicious oath came as answer, distinct in the

SO QUICK WAS HIS PIVOTING MOTION THAT CASEY
WAS ALMOST UNSEATED

stillness. Then: "You get back and mind your own business!"

McHale's rifle action clicked and clashed as he levered a cartridge from magazine to chamber. "Up with your hands, the bunch of you," he ordered, "or ——"

The remainder was lost in the bark of a gun as one of the other party fired. McHale's horse jumped as though stung, just as he pulled the trigger, bumping into Shiner. Immediately that uncertain quadruped wheeled and kicked at him. So quick was his pivoting motion that Casey was almost unseated. He saved himself, but lost his rifle, which fell to the ground. With a furious curse and a jerk of the bit he wheeled Shiner around, drawing his automatic belt gun.

But the four strangers had taken advantage of the incident to turn and plunge back into the coulée. They were almost out of sight. Casey's gun spat a continuous jet of flame across the night, the rapid reports blending into a roll of sound. McHale, cursing his unsteady horse, fired again and again. But the strangers, apparently unhurt, swept out of sight.

Casey leaped to the ground, secured his rifle, and was back in the saddle again in an instant. They sailed into the shallow head of the coulée at a dead run, Casey struggling to refill the clip of his automatic, McHale cursing his horse and himself because he had used the rifle instead of his six-shooter.

At its head the coulée was merely a slight depression. Farther on it broadened and deepened. Down the middle of its length ran a sinuous grove of cottonwoods. On either side its flanks were bare, white with clay and alkali, rising to steep banks of yellow earth, bald and bleached in the moonlight.

Through this natural theatre thundered pursuers and pursued. The latter had secured a good lead. The windings of the coulée hid them from view.

Suddenly Casey became aware that there was no one ahead — that he and McHale were riding madly, to no purpose. At the same moment the latter made the like discovery. Their horses' hoofs slid and cut grooves in the earth as the riders dragged them to a halt. Usually considerate, in the excitement of the moment they used the brutal methods of the "buster."

"They've doubled back on us!" cried McHale. "Cut through them cottonwoods somewheres and let us go by a-hellin'. Fooled us, by glory, like we was a pair of hide-an'-go-seek kids. Yes — there they go now! Look up by the top past that cut bank!" He lifted his rifle as he spoke.

High up at the coulée's rim, some hundreds of yards away, figures moved. At that distance, even in the brilliant moonlight, details were lost. The eye could discern black spots merely; but it seemed that the men had dismounted for the ascent, and were helping the horses to scramble upward.

McHale fired, shoved down the lever, drew it home, and fired again. Since the light did not serve to show the dust puffs of the bullets, he could not tell whether he was shooting high or low. The main thing was that he did not hit. Casey chimed in. The bluffs and banks echoed to the reports of the high-powered rifles; but the figures gained the rim and vanished. Immediately afterward a tongue of flame leaped from the spot where they were last seen, and a bullet sang in close proximity to Casey's head. They wheeled into the shelter of the trees, where the shadows effectually concealed their whereabout. At short intervals bullets searched for their position. McHale bit large consolation and spat in disgust.

"I reckon it's a get-away," he said. "I ain't fool enough to go up that bank while they're there. And by the time we'd get around they'd be a couple of miles 'most anywheres."

"We've got ourselves to blame," said Casey.

"Well, that first shot burned up this cayuse of mine," McHale grumbled. "How could I shoot, with him jumpin' around? And that blasted, yeller-hided buzzard head of yours, he don't know no better'n to whale into him with both heels. It wouldn't happen again, not in a million years."

"It doesn't need to," said Casey sourly. "We found our meat, and we couldn't stop it."

"The laugh is on us," McHale admitted. "For the powder we burned we sure ought to have a scalp

or two to show. Still, moonlight shootin' is chance shootin', and when a cussed mean cayuse is sashayin' round if a man hits anything but scenery he's lucky!"

"I thought that old-timer, Dade, was doing the talking."

"Sure he was. And I'll bet it was his *tillikum*, Cross, that took the first crack at us. Didn't waste no time. He's some soon, that feller. I s'pose they got a camp, somewheres. No use tryin' to find it. We can't prove that they used the powder on our dams. Well, what say if we point out for home? Daylight's breakin' now."

A pale light was spreading in the east, underneath the stars that rimmed the horizon. Objects became more visible. As they rode unmolested from the coulée the pale light began to flush faintly. Rosy shafts shot upward, and the stars vanished. Here and there birds began to twitter. An old grouse scuttled away, wings a-trail, as if mortally hurt, to distract attention from her young brood hidden in the short grass. A huge owl sailed ghostlike on silent wings, homeward bound from midnight foray. A coyote yipped shrill protest against the day. Away to the west, where the mountains loomed grandly, bright lights lay on peaks still white with the remnants of winter snows. Suddenly, driving the shadows before it, the sun seemed to leap above the rim of the world.

CHAPTER XX

DURING the next twelve hours there was much riding from ranch to ranch. Of all the small dams constructed and maintained by the ranchers for irrigation purposes but one remained; and that one was Donald McCrae's.

McCrae himself considered this an invidious distinction. He would have preferred to suffer with his neighbours. He did not know why his structure had been spared, and he lent men and teams to others, labouring hard himself in the task of rebuilding.

The temper of the ranchers was at the breaking point. Naturally the blame fell on Farwell; he was the villain of the piece. He had expected unpopularity, but he had no idea of the depth of it. The black looks he met did not disturb him in the least; nor, to do him justice, would he have been seriously alarmed if he had known that more than one man was quite ready to pick a deadly quarrel with him. For some time he had not seen Sheila McCrae, but he found himself thinking of her constantly. And so, one evening he rode over to Talapus.

Somewhat to his relief, neither McCrae nor Sandy was visible. Mrs. McCrae was calmly civil. Her manner gave no hint that he was unwelcome. Sheila, she told him, had gone for a walk somewhere along the ditch.

"Oh," said Farwell, with elaborate carelessness, "then I think I'll just stroll along and meet her."

At the end of ten minutes' walk he came upon the girl. She was sitting, her chin propped on her hands, beside the stream where a little bordering grove of willows had sprung up. The deep murmur of the running water muffled his footsteps so that she neither saw nor heard him till he was at her side.

"Good evening," he said.

She turned her head slowly, without start or exclamation.

"I did not expect to see you, Mr. Farwell."

"I thought I'd run over," he said awkwardly. "I intended to come before."

She allowed a long minute of silence to lie between them. "And why have you come now?" she asked.

"Why?" Farwell repeated the word. "Why? I wanted to see you. Why shouldn't I come?"

"You ought to know why. It's one thing to do your work; but it's quite another to blow up our dams!"

"Why do you think I did that?"

"Because I have ordinary common sense. I don't suppose you did it with your own hand. But

you've brought in a bunch of toughs and gunmen to overawe us and do your dirty work. It will lead to serious trouble."

"I can handle trouble," said Farwell grimly. "Has anybody meddled with your dam?"

"No."

"Then I don't see what you have to complain of. I don't admit anything. But when you get indignant at blowing up dams you ought to remember what happened to ours.

"Oh, as for that" — she shrugged her shoulders. "We had to have water. Nobody blamed you before. But these dams that did you no harm — that's different."

"But you *have* water. Your own dam is all right," he insisted.

"Yes. And do you know what people are saying? They say that the reason is because we have some sort of an understanding with you. They say ——" She stopped abruptly.

"What else do they say?"

"Other things. I've told you enough."

"What do you care?"

"Well, I do care. This is the only house you come to. Your visits must end now."

"End?" Farwell echoed. "I guess not. Not unless you absolutely forbid me to come. And then I don't know. I'd find it pretty hard."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you I would," he protested. "You don't know."

"Bosh! We're not so fascinating as that."

Now Farwell was of the battle-axe type. He was accustomed to take what he wanted, to smash through opposition. He looked at the girl facing him in the fading light, and a great desire swelled within him. Her words gave the needed spur to his courage, and he went to the point as he would have gone in to quell a riot in a camp.

"'We,'" he said. "Who's talking of 'we'? I'm not. I come to see *you*. You ought to know that. Of course you know it. I didn't think I'd ever fall in love, but I *have*. You might as well know it now. I don't know whether you think anything of me or not; it would be just my luck if you didn't. Anyway, that's how I feel, and I'm not going to give up seeing you just because some people have set a crazy yarn going."

The words boiled out of him like steam from a hot spring. He scowled at her ferociously, his eyes hot and angry. It would have been difficult to imagine a more unloverlike attitude. And yet she had no doubt of his sincerity. She would have been less than woman if she had not suspected his feelings before. But she had not expected this outbreak.

"I'm sorry you said that," she told him quietly. "It's quite impossible. I can tell you now what I

couldn't tell you before. People say that I have promised to marry you in exchange for your promise that we shall have water for the ranch."

"If you'll tell me the name of a man who utters an infernal lie like that I'll wring his neck," he growled.

"I believe you would. But what good would it do? You can't fight rumours and gossip in that way. That's the trouble with you — you depend on force alone. Can't you see the position this puts us in — puts *me* in? You can't come here any more."

"I don't see that at all," he objected. "I'll blow up your dam myself if you think it will help, but as for not seeing you — why, it's out of the question. I've got to see you. I'm going to see you. I can't help it. I tell you I think of you all the time. Why, hang it, Sheila, I think of you when I ought to be thinking of my work."

She would have laughed if she had not seen that he was in deadly earnest. His work was a fetish, all-absorbing, demanding and receiving the tribute of his entire attention and energy. That thought of a woman should come between him and it was proof positive of devotion extraordinary.

"You must not do that," she said, gently.

"But I can't help it," he reiterated. "It's new to me, this. I can't concentrate on my work. I keep thinking of you. If that isn't being in love, what in thunder is? I'm talking to you as straight

as I'd talk to a man. I believe I love you as much as any woman was ever loved. You don't know much about me, but I'm considered a good man in my profession. From a material point of view I'm all right."

"If I cared for you that would be the last thing I'd think of."

"Why can't you care for me?" he demanded. "I don't expect much. We'd get along."

"No," she said decidedly. "No. It's impossible. We're comparatively strangers. I think you're going to be a big man some day. I rather admire you in some ways. But that is all.

"Well, anyway, I'm not going to quit," he announced doggedly. "I never gave up anything yet. You talk as if it didn't matter! Maybe it doesn't to you, but it does to me. You don't know how much I care. I can't tell you, either. This talk isn't my line. Look here, though. About ten years ago, down in the desert of the Southwest, my horse broke his leg, and I was set afoot. I nearly died of thirst before I got out. All those blistering days, while I stumbled along in that baking hell, I kept thinking of a cool spring we had on our place when I was a boy. It bubbled up in moss at the foot of a big cedar, and I used to lie flat and drink till I couldn't hold any more. It was the sweetest water in the world. All those days I tortured myself by thinking of it. I'd have given my soul,

if I have one, to satisfy my thirst at that spring. And that's how I feel about you. I want your love as I wanted that water."

"I'm very sorry," she said. "It's out of the question."

"But why?" he demanded. "Give me a chance. I'm not a monster. Or do you mean that you care for somebody else? Is that it? Do you care anything for that Dunne? A fellow that's in love with another woman!"

Even in the dying light he could see the dark flush that surged over cheek and brow. She rose to the full height of her lithe figure, facing him.

"No, I don't!" she flamed. "But if I did what business would it be of yours? Casey Dunne is my friend — a gentleman — which is more than you seem to be, Mr. Farwell."

She took a step toward him in her indignation. Suddenly, with a sweep of his arm, he clipped her to him, kissing her on forehead and cheek. She struck him in the face with her clenched fist driven by muscles as hard as an athlete's.

"You great brute!" she panted.

With the blow and the words, Farwell's moment of madness passed. He held her from him at arm's length.

"A brute!" he said. "You're right. I didn't know it before. Now, I do. How can I put myself right with you?"

"Let me go!" she cried.

As he released her she heard the quick pad of running feet. Out of the dusk behind her bounded young Sandy McCrae. He came like a young wolf to its first kill, his lips lifted in a snarl. In his right hand lay a long-barrelled, black Colt's.

"Sheila!" he cried. "What's the matter? Who's this? What in — ah!"

The gun leaped up. Instinctively she threw out her hand, striking it as he pulled the trigger. A thin stream of flame blazed almost into Farwell's face, and the sharp report split the evening silence into fragments. Something like a questing finger of death ran through his hair, and his hat twitched from his head, to flutter down softly ten feet away. But he was unhurt.

Sheila locked both arms around her brother's, dragging it down.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "I tell you no, Sandy! Don't shoot again. It's a mistake."

He wrenched furiously to free his hand. "Mistake!" he shouted. "He was holding you! I saw him. I heard you. Let go. I'll blow his heart out!"

But she clung to his arm. "It's a mistake, Sandy, I tell you! Can't you understand me? Don't use that gun. I won't let you. Give it to me!"

He ceased his attempts to free his arm. "All

right, Sheila. I won't shoot — this time. You, Farwell, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Mighty little," Farwell replied. "I asked your sister to marry me, and she refused. I kissed her against her will. That's all — and plenty. If you want my opinion, I think I ought to be shot."

Sandy glared at him, taken aback by this frank admission.

"If she hadn't jolted my hand you sure would have been," he said grimly. "You're mighty lucky to be alive right now. After this if I see you ——"

"Shut up, Sandy!" Sheila interrupted authoritatively, with sisterly directness. "I'm quite able to look after my own affairs. Mr. Farwell is sorry. You be white enough to let it go that way."

"It's up to you, if you want it," Sandy replied. "If you can stand for a thing like that once I can. But not twice."

"There won't be any twice. Shall we go to the house, Mr. Farwell?"

Farwell, amazed, fell into step with her. He had expected to be overwhelmed with reproaches, to face a storm of feminine anger. Still, he could not think that she was palliating his offence; and he was quite aware that she had saved his life. Young McCrae, in offended dignity, stalked in front.

"I want you to know," said Farwell, "that I'm utterly ashamed of myself. To prove it I'm going

to do the best I can. I'm going to wire in my resignation, and I'm going away."

"Don't."

"What?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Don't. You are sorry, and that's the main thing. We won't mention it again. And neither will Sandy. But for a while you must not come here."

"I'll do anything," he said. "I think you are the best girl on earth."

Sheila did not reply; but she did not reprove him.

Mrs. McCrae, looking somewhat anxious, met them at the house.

"I heard a shot," she said. "Was it you, Sandy?"

"Yes," her son replied.

"What did you shoot at?"

The young man glanced at Farwell from the corner of his eye.

"A skunk," he replied. "I missed him."

Sheila bit her lip angrily. Farwell took his medicine in silence.

CHAPTER XXI

A WEEK sufficed to put the ranchers' ditches and dams in condition to take care of water; but at the end of that time there was little water to take care of. It was being diverted into the company's ditch system. Their ditches were running full, emptying upon lands on which scarcely a pretence of cultivation was being made, while the actual farmers, just when they needed it most, had barely sufficient water for their domestic purposes, for stock, and for their small gardens. There was none for the main crops in the fields.

Naturally the crops suffered, the grain most of all. A series of hot, dry winds came. With water they would have done little or no damage; without it the leaves curled, shrivelled, and turned pale, starving for lack of moisture. And the peculiarly galling feature of it was that the water which would have meant so much was practically running to waste.

In spite of these troubles Casey managed to devote time to his guests. His projected excursion to the foothills was abandoned, but he and Clyde rode almost daily. He had reserved his little gray

mare, Dolly, for her use, and she was becoming, if not expert, at least confident in the saddle.

She grew to love the long evenings, the soft twilights, the warm, sweet scent of the grasses, and the great stillness broken only by an occasional word and the beat of willing hoofs. On these evening rides she allowed her imagination to run riot. It pleased her to pretend that she and Casey were the only inhabitants of the land — an Eve and Adam of the West, pioneers of a remote civilization. All day she looked forward to this hour or two; at night, in her bed, she lived them over, recreating each mile, each word, each little thing — how the great owl had sailed ghostly across their path, the gray shape of a coyote fading into the dusk, the young broods of grouse hiding in the grass.

Occasionally she undertook to analyze her feelings toward Casey Dunne, but the result was indefinite. She enjoyed his companionship, looked forward to it, remembered his words, his tricks of manner and speech. But these things, she told herself, were not conclusive.

His sentiments she had no means of judging. He was forever doing little things to please her; but then he did as much for others. At times he was confidential; but he seldom talked of himself, his confidences taking the form of allowing her to share his private viewpoint, revealing to some extent his mental processes. But he had never

said one word which indicated more than friendship. Clyde saw little of Sheila McCrae. The latter had ridden over once or twice to see, as she said, how Casey was treating them. On these occasions Clyde experienced a recurrence of latent hostility. Sheila took no pains whatever with her appearance. She came in a worn riding costume, plain, serviceable, workmanlike; and she talked water and crops and stock with Casey and McHale, avoiding more feminine topics. If there was any understanding between her and Casey it did not appear to Clyde. But it was this unreasoning hostility more than anything else which made Clyde doubt herself. Was it, she wondered, in reality jealousy?

She put the thought from her indignantly, but it refused to be banished. She even catalogued her attractions, comparing them with the other girl's. The balance was in her favour; but in the end she felt ashamed of herself. Why should she do this? She found no satisfactory reply.

After a week of the water famine she saw a change in her host. He was more silent, thoughtful. Often when they rode together he had nothing to say, staring at the horizon with narrowed eyes.

"Do you ever tell anybody your troubles?" she asked abruptly one evening. They were riding slowly homeward, and the silence had been especially marked.

"Not very often," Casey replied. "People I've

met have usually had enough of their own. They didn't want to hear mine."

"Well, I haven't many troubles, and I'd like to share yours, if I may. I suppose it's this water question."

"Why, yes," he admitted. "It's getting to be a mighty hard thing to swallow — and look pleasant."

"I know." She nodded sympathetically. "You feel helpless."

"Not that exactly. The difficulty is to know just what to do — whether to do anything or not. The boys are very hostile. It wouldn't take much to start them."

"In what direction?"

"In any that would give action. They'd like nothing better than open war."

She exclaimed at the words. "Surely there's no possibility of that?"

"More than a possibility," he returned gravely. "Water is a necessity to us. The people who have taken it do not require it. They have established what is practically an armed camp. Also they have brought in a number of hard citizens — what are known as 'gunmen' — to overawe us. These patrol their ditch system, and warn us to keep away from it. It is guarded at every important point. Not satisfied with this, some of these fellows have been apparently looking for trouble in town and elsewhere. One of these fine days they will get it."

He shook his head forebodingly. They topped a rise as he spoke. Below them lay the line of the company's main canal. As they rode down to it a man on a horse seemed to appear from nowhere in particular, and came toward them. As he drew nearer Casey recognized the man Cross.

Cross raised his hat in acknowledgment of Clyde's presence. But his words to Casey were very much to the point.

"You got notice to keep off this property," said he.

"Well?" said Casey.

"Do it," said Cross. "Hike — meanin' *you*, understand, and not the lady. She's plumb welcome to ride where she likes. I savvy your game, Dunne. You ain't got nerve enough to ride out here alone, and you bring a woman with you to play safe."

Casey paled with anger beneath his tan. "Mr. Cross," he said quietly, "that goes — because the lady is with me. But I rather think one of us will stay in this country a long time."

"Cheap bluff," Cross sneered. "You ain't goin' to prospect round these ditches, linin' them up for powder. Come here alone, and I'll make you eat the sights off of my gun."

Casey laughed softly — with him most dangerous of signs.

"Mr. Cross, you really amuse me. I won't

argue the point just now. Later, perhaps. Good evening."

Clyde had listened in amazement. Once more she had experienced the sensation of standing on the brink of tragedy. Once more it had failed to occur.

"And that's one of the gunmen," said Casey. "That's what we have been putting up with. I think it will have to stop."

"Don't get into any trouble," she begged. "Promise me you won't. What do you care what men like that say?"

"I'm partly human," he replied grimly. "I can stand as much as most men, but there are some things I won't stand. I'm not going to climb a tree for any man. However, I won't crowd things with Cross, though I know plenty of men that would, on that provocation. I'm all for peace and a quiet life. You won't think I'm afraid, I hope."

"Certainly not," she said indignantly. "You don't give me much of your confidence, but I know you better than to think such a thing. I wish you would tell me more of what is going on. Let me be your friend, and not merely your guest. Talk to me as you would to — Miss McCrae.

It was the first time she had spoken to him of Sheila. It was her challenge. She would be on the same footing.

"Sheila's different," he replied. "Sheila's one of

us. I've known her for years. She's a good deal like a sister."

"Oh," she said, "a *sister?*"

To have saved her immortal soul she could not have kept the note of sceptical interrogation from the word. He laughed.

"Yes, a sister. Why, great Scott! you didn't think I was in love with her, did you, just because I call her by her first name? I think everything of her, but not in that way. She's a thousand times too good for me. Besides, she knows me too well. That's usually fatal to sentiment. That's why no man is a hero to his wife."

"How do you know he isn't? Kitty Wade simply worships her husband."

"Maybe. But I'll bet his pedestal isn't nearly so high as it was before they were married. When you marry, Miss Burnaby" — he smiled at her frankly — "you will occupy the pedestal yourself."

"Doesn't your rule work both ways?" she laughed.

"I won't admit it — to you, anyway."

"Why not — to me?"

"Because Wade tells me no man can be forced to incriminate himself," he replied.

Clyde glanced at him swiftly, flushing in the dusk. But she did not press for an explanation. She was satisfied. She was no longer jealous of Sheila McCrae.

When they arrived at the ranch Dunne took the horses to the stables. Clyde, entering the house, found Wade alone, deep in newspapers, the accumulation of a week which he had just received. There was a package of letters for Clyde.

"Look here, Clyde," said the laywer. "Here's a funny thing." He held a newspaper open at the market page. "This Western Airline stock is as jumpy as a fever chart. For a while it went down and down and down, away below what I should think to be its intrinsic value. There was a rumour of a passed dividend. Nothing definite — merely a rumour. Then came another rumour of an application for a charter for a competing line. Both these stories seem to have brought out considerable stock. There was heavy selling. Likely the traders went short. I'll bet some of them were nipped, too, for the market went up without warning — yes, by George! bounced like a rubber ball."

Clyde looked up from a letter which enclosed a formal-looking statement. "What would send it up?"

"Buyers in excess of sellers — in other words, demand in excess of supply," Wade responded. "That's on the face of it. Probably not half a dozen men know the inside. Orders may have been issued to support the stock — that is, to buy all offered in order to keep the price from declining farther. It's hard to say, at this distance. It's

possible that the depressing rumours may have originated with the very men who are now supporting the stock."

"Why should they do that?"

"To buy more cheaply shares which would be offered in consequence. It's funny, though," he continued, opening another paper. "Now, here's a later date — let's see — yes, here we are. The market opened five points higher than it closed on the preceding day, and it closed ten points above that opening. Holy Moses! do you know what that means?"

"Demand in excess of supply."

"Demand! Supply!" Wade echoed contemptuously. "Economics be hanged! It means a fight for Western Air. It means that somebody is willing to pay a fancy price for shares. Why? Because a few shares one way or the other mean the ownership of the road, the dictation of its policy. There's no other explanation. I wonder who ——"

"Look at this," said Clyde. She handed him a telegram. He read:

Sell nothing whatever until you hear from me. Instruct Bradley & Gauss. JIM.

Wade's lips puckered in a noiseless whistle. He did not need to be told that "Jim" was Clyde's uncle, wily old Jim Hess, of the Hess System. It was he who was out gunning for York and Western

Air, and he had the reputation of getting what he went after. What his tactics had been Wade could only surmise. But the antics of the stock were proof that he was in earnest.

"Well," he queried, "what do you know about this, young lady? Have you been holding out on me?"

"I haven't much information," she replied. "Bradley & Gauss are my brokers. They have been buying Western Air for me as it was offered. There's their statement. Uncle Jim told me to buy it — said that it ought to be worth as much as Hess System some day."

"Heavens! What a tip!" Wade exclaimed. "This will be good news for Casey."

"I don't want him to know."

"Why not?"

"Well, he — he — that is, he might be disappointed. Uncle Jim may not get control. If he does he'll treat everybody fairly, of course. I don't want to raise false hopes."

"Considerate of you," said Wade, "not to say ingenious."

She flushed angrily for a moment, and then laughed.

"It's all the reason you'll get. Be a good friend, do. Promise! Also you are to say nothing to Kitty."

"Afraid of being jollied?"

"Mr. Wade, you are impertinent!" But her eyes laughed at him.

"I'll keep your dark secret," said Wade. "It will be a joke on Kitty!"

And so Casey Dunne was left in ignorance.

CHAPTER XXII

TOM McHALE ambled into Coldstream one afternoon, and dropped his pony's reins behind the station. Thence he clanked his spurs into Mr. Quilty's sanctum. That gentleman, nodding somnolently above a blackened clay pipe, rolled an appraising eye at him.

"Fwhere in Hiven's name is the maskyrade at?" he queried sourly. "An' do yez riprisint Wild Bill Hickox — rest his sowl — or th' 'Pache Kid — th' divil burn him!"

Tom glanced down at his ancient regalia of worn leather chaps, spurs, and the old forty-one that sagged from his right hip, and grinned.

"Guns is coming into style again out our way," he replied. "All the best families wears 'em. There's so many of these here durn hobos and railway men and Irish and other low characters ——"

"Th' nerve of yez!" snorted Mr. Quilty. "And the name iv yez 'McHale!' — as Irish, be hivins, as Con iv th' Hundred Battles!"

McHale chuckled to himself, having succeeded in his purpose of getting Mr. Quilty going.

"Irish? Not on your life!" he denied gravely.

"What put that notion in your head? The McHales is high-grade Scotch. Always was. They come from Loch Lomond or Commarashindhu or them parts. Annie Laurie married a McHale. Of course we're Scotch. You can tell by the Mac. The only McHale that ever was in Ireland went there to civilize it."

"To civ'lize Ireland!" Mr. Quilty cried in derision. "Hear till him! And Ireland the owldest civ'lization in the wurruld, barrin' none, and the best! Faix, we was givin' lessons in it to all mankind whin th' dom raggety-britched tattherdemalions iv Scotchmen hadn't th' dacincy to wear kilts, even, but wint about bare to th' four winds iv hivin, a barbarious race lower nor a Digger Injun, a scandal to God, man, and faymales black and white."

"Well, maybe you're right about them old times, Corney," admitted McHale, with an innocent face. "I meant a little later than that. This here McHale was with William the Conqueror at the Battle of the Boyne ——"

Mr. Quilty spat at the mention of this historic event.

"Bad scran till him, then!" he exclaimed. "Yez do be a high-grade liar, and ign'rant as well. Willyum th' Conq'ror was Irish on his mother's side, an' he bate th' heads off iv th' bloody Sassenach, an' soaked their king wan in th' eye wid a bow 'n' arry at a fight I disremimber th' name of, back a

thousand years before Willyum th' Dutchman — may his sowl get its needin's! — come out iv his swamps. I tell yez th' McHales come from Galway. In th' good owld days they hanged thim be th' dozen to th' glor iv God an' th' greater safety iv all live stock. An th' pity is they didn't make a cleaner job iv ut."

McHale, who was enjoying himself hugely, sifted tobacco into paper.

"I won't say you ain't right, Corney," he observed mildly. "I always understood we was Scotch, but I ain't noways bigoted about it. That hangin' business seems to point to us bein' Irish. Did you ever notice how many Irishmen is hanged? Of course, there's lots ain't that ought to be, but the general average is sure high."

"I hope to glory ye boost it wan higher yerself," Quilty retorted. "Small loss 'tw'u'd be to anny wan. A divil iv a desp'rado yez are, wid yer gun an' all! I'm a good mind to swipe yez over th' nut wid me lanthern an' take ut away from yez!"

McHale drew the weapon gently, and spun it on his finger, checking the revolutions six times with startling suddenness. Mr. Quilty watched him sourly.

"Play thricks!" he commented. "Spin a gun! Huh! Why don't yez get a job wid a dhrama that shows the West as it used to wasn't? I knowed wan iv thim gun twirlers wanst. He was a burrd pluggin'

tomatty cans an' such — a fair wonder he was. But wan day he starts to make a pinwheel iv his finger forninst a stranger he mistakes fer a tindherfut, an' he gets th' face iv him blowed in be a derringer from that same stranger's coat pocket."

"Sure," McHale agreed. "It was comin' to him. He should have stuck to tomatter cans. Them plays is plumb safe."

"They's no safe play wid a gun," Mr. Quilty declared oracularly. "I'm an owlder man nor ye, an' I worked me way West wid railway construction. I knowed th' owld-time gunmen — the wans they tell stories of. Where are they now? Dead, ivery mother's son iv thim, an' most iv thim got it from a gun. No matther how quick a man is, if he kapes at ut long enough he meets up wid some felly that bates him till it — wanst. And wanst is enough.

"Plenty," McHale agreed. "Sure. The system is not to meet that sport. I don't figure he lives in these parts."

Mr. Quilty blinked at him for a moment, and lowered his voice. "See, now, b'y," said he, "I'm strong for mindin' me own business, but a wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse. Nobody's been hurted hereabouts yet, but keep at ut and some wan will be. I don't want ut to be you or Casey. Go aisy, like a good la-ad."

"I'm easy as a fox-trot," said McHale. "So's Casey. We ain't crowdin' nothin'. Only we're

some tired of havin' a hot iron held to our hides. We sorter hate to smell our own hair singein'. We ain't on the prod, but we don't aim to be run off our own range, and that goes as it lies."

He rose, flipping his cigarette through the open window, and inquired for freight. They were expecting a binder and a mower. These had not arrived. McHale looked at the date of his bill of lading, and stated his opinion of the railway.

"Be ashamed, bawlin' out me employers in me prisince," said Mr. Quilty. "G'wan out o' here, before I take a shotgun to yez."

"Come up and have a drink," McHale invited.

"Agin' the rules whin on duty," Quilty refused. "An' I do be on duty whiniver I'm awake. 'Tis prohibition the comp'ny has on me, no less."

McHale rode up the straggling street to Shiller's hotel, and dismounted. Bob Shiller in shirt sleeves sat on the veranda.

"They's a right smart o' dust to-day, Bob," said McHale. "S'pose we sorter sprinkle it some."

"We'll go into one of the back rooms, where it's cooler," proposed Shiller.

"Oh, I'd just as soon go to the bar," said McHale. "Might be some of the boys there. I like to lean up against the wood."

"Well ——" Shiller began, and stopped uncertainly.

"Well — what?" McHale demanded.

"Just as well you don't go into the bar right now," Shiller explained. "You had a sort of a run-in with a feller named Cross, hadn't you — you or Casey? He's in there with a couple of his friends — hard-lookin' nuts. He's some tanked, and shootin' off his mouth. We'll have Billy bring us what we want where it's cooler."

McHale kicked a post meditatively three times.

"There's mighty little style about me, Bob," he said. "I'm democratic a lot. Havin' drinks sent up to a private room looks to me a heap like throwin' on dog."

"I asked you," said Shiller. "It's my house. The drinks are on me."

"I spoke of the dust," McHale reminded him. "That makes it my drinks. And then I done asked a man to meet me in the bar. I wouldn't like to keep him waitin'."

"I don't want trouble here," said Shiller positively. "I ask you in a friendly way not to make it."

"Well, I ain't makin' it, am I?" said McHale. "That's all right about not wantin' trouble, but I got other things to think of. This here Cross and Dade and that bunch don't run the country. Mighty funny if I have to drink in a back room for them gents. Next thing you'll want me to climb a tree. I'm allowin' to stop my thirst facin' a mirror with one foot on a rail. I'll do it that way, or you and me won't be friends no more."

"Go to it, then," said Shiller. "You always was a bullhead."

McHale grinned, hitched his holster forward a trifle, and walked toward the bar. As he entered he took a swift survey of its half dozen occupants.

Three of them were regulars, citizens of Coldstream. The others were strangers, and each of them wore a gun down his thigh. They were of the type known as "hard-faced." Cross, a glass in his right hand, was standing facing the door. As it pushed open he turned his head and stared at McHale, whom he did not immediately recognize.

"Come on, friend," said he; "get in on this."

"Sure," said McHale promptly. "A little number nine, Billy. Here's a ho!" He set his glass down, and faced Cross. "Come again, boys. What'll you take with me?"

But Cross swore suddenly. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Look at what blowed in off of one of them dry-ranch layouts!"

McHale smiled blandly, pushing a bottle in his direction.

"Beats all how some things drift about all over the country." he observed. "Tumbleweeds and such. They go rollin' along mighty gay till they bump into a wire fence somewheres."

"It's sure a wonder to me your boss lets you stray this far off," said Cross, with sarcasm. "He needs

a man to look after him the worst way. He don't seem to have no sand. I met up with him along our ditch a while back, and I told him to hike. You bet he did. Only that he'd a girl with him I'd have run him clean back to his reservation."

"You want to get a movin'-picture layout," McHale suggested. "That'd make a right good show — *you* runnin' Casey. You used to work for one of them outfits, didn't you?"

"No. What makes you think I did?"

"Your face looked sorter familiar to me," McHale replied. "Studyin' on it, it seems like I'd seen it in one of them picture shows down in Cheyenne. Right good show, too. It showed a bunch of boys after a hoss thief. He got away."

"Haw-haw!" laughed one of the regulars, and suddenly froze to silence. Billy, behind the bar, stood as if petrified, towel in hand. Cross's face, flushed with liquor, blackened in a ferocious scowl.

"You —— —— ——!" he roared. "What do you mean by that?"

"Mean?" asked McHale innocently. "Why, I was tellin' you about a show I seen. What's wrong with that?"

"You called me a horse thief!" cried Cross.

"Who? Me?" said McHale. "Why, no, Mr. Cross, you ain't no hoss thief. I know different. If anybody says you are, you just send him right

along to me. No, sir; I know you ain't. There's two good reasons against it."

Cross glared at him, his fingers beginning to twitch.

"Let's hear them," he said. "If they ain't good you go out of that door feet first."

"They're plumb good — best you ever heard," McHale affirmed. "Now, listen. Here's how I know you ain't no hoss thief: For one thing, you got too much mouth; and for another you ain't got the nerve!"

Out of the dead silence came Shiller's voice from the door:

"I'll fill the first man that makes a move plumb full of buckshot. If there's any shootin' in here, I'm doin' it myself." He held a pump gun at his shoulder, the muzzle dominating the group. "You, Tom," he continued, "you said you wouldn't make trouble."

"Am I makin' it?" asked McHale.

"Are you makin' it?" Shiller repeated. "Oh, no, you ain't. You're a gentle, meek-and-mild pilgrim, you are. I ain't goin' to hold this gun all day, neither. You better hit the high spots. I'll give you time to get on your cayuse and drift. At the end of two minutes this man goes out of that door, and I ain't responsible for what happens. I'm sure sorry, Tom, to treat you like this, but I got my house to consider."

"That's all right, Bob," said McHale. "Looks like you hold the ace. I'll step. Far's I'm concerned you needn't keep them gents two minutes nor one." He turned to the door.

"I'm lookin' for you, McHale," said Cross.

"Come a-runnin'," said McHale. "Bring your friends."

He walked into the middle of the road, turned, and waited. His action attracted little attention. Coldstream was indoors, somnolent with the afternoon heat. Across the street the proprietor of the general store commented lazily to a friend:

"What's Tom McHale doin'?"

"Some fool joke. He's full of them. I reckon he wants us to ask him."

McHale called to them: "Boys, if I was you I'd move out of line of me and Bob's door."

"What did I tell you?" the wise one commented. "You bet I don't bite. I ——"

Out of the door of Shiller's surged Cross, gun in hand. Uncertain where to find McHale, he glared about. Then, as he saw him standing in the middle of the road, the weapon seemed to leap to a level. Simultaneously McHale shot from the hip.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Pale-pink flashes stabbed the afternoon light. Coldstream echoed to the fusillade. Its inhabitants ran to doors and windows, streaming into the streets. One of the store windows suddenly starred. Long

lines, like cracks in thin ice, appeared in it, radiating from a common centre. The proprietor and his friend, electrified, ducked and sprang for shelter. A woman screamed in fright.

Suddenly Cross staggered, turning halfway around. The deadly rage in his face changed to blank wonder. His pistol arm sagged. Then he collapsed gently, not as a tree falls, but as an overweighted sapling bends, swaying backward until, overbalanced, he thudded limply on the ground.

McHale, half crouched like a fighting animal awaiting an attack, peered with burning eyes over the hot muzzle of his gun at the prostrate figure. Swiftly he swung out the cylinder of the weapon, ejected the empty shells, refilled the chambers, and snapped it shut. Shiller's door opened. McHale covered it instantly, but it was Shiller himself.

"So you done it, did you?" he said.

"Sure," said McHale. "He comes a-shootin', and I gets him. Likewise I gets them two *tillikums* of his if they want it that way."

"Billy's keepin' them quiet with the pump gun," Shiller informed him. "You better get out o' town. I'll clean up your mess, darn you! Git quick. Them fellers expects some more in."

McHale nodded. "I ain't organized to stand off a whole posse with one gun. So long, Bob. I'm plumb sorry I mixed you into this. They won't like you much now."

"They don't need to," said Shiller. "Want any money? Want another gun? I got a handy little three-ought-three carbine."

"No. I'll get my own outfit. I may have to lie out for a spell. Well, I'll be movin'."

He mounted swiftly. Men crowding up to the scene of the affray stopped suddenly. Few of them had seen the like before. They shrank back, awed, from the killer. He rode down the street, gun in hand, casting swift glances right and left, ready for any attempt to stop him. There was none. He vanished in the swells of brown grasses, riding at an easy lope, as unhurried as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOM McHALE reached Chakchak, stabled his horse, made a hasty toilet, and attacked a belated supper. While he was eating with hearty appetite Casey and Wade strolled in.

"Did that freight come?" asked Casey.

"Nope," said McHale. "I got a tracer started after her."

"Anything doing in town?"

"Why, I reckon there was a *leetle* excitement there for a few minutes," said McHale. "Sort of an argument in front of Bob Shiller's."

Casey, from his knowledge of McHale, came to attention at once. "Well?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, it was me and this here Cross," McHale explained. "I downed him."

"In the argument?" laughed Wade, who did not comprehend. But Casey asked quickly: "Gun?"

McHale nodded.

"You did! How'd it happen? Is he dead?"

"I miss once, but three times I'm pretty near centre," McHale replied. "Course, I didn't wait to hold no inquest, but if he ain't forded Jordan's tide by now he's plumb lucky; also tough. Only

thing makes me doubt it is the way he goes down. He don't come ahead on his face the way a man does when he's plugged for keeps; but he sorter sags backward, so he may have a chance. Still, I reckon she's a slim one."

Casey got the full story with half a dozen brief questions.

"Clear case of self-defence, isn't it, Wade?"

"Looks that way, if the evidence corroborates what he says," the lawyer replied. "Are you sure he shot first, Tom?"

"Better put it he meant to shoot first," McHale responded. "Naturally, I ain't standin' round waitin' for no sightin' shots. It comes close to an even break."

"That's good enough," Wade declared. "If his actions left no doubt of his hostile purpose in your mind you were justified in protecting yourself."

"They sure didn't," said McHale. "He's out to down me, and I know it. There ain't no Alphonse and Gaston stuff when he comes boilin' out, pullin' his gun. I just sail in to get action while I got the chance."

"Exactly," said Wade. "Well, Tom, you'll be arrested, of course. If Cross isn't dead, likely you can get bail. If he is, I'm afraid you'll have to remain in custody till the trial. I'll defend you myself, if you'll let me. Or maybe it would be better to get a man whose practice is more on

the criminal side. I'll get the best there is for you."

"I'm obliged," said McHale. "I'll stand a trial all right, but I ain't figurin' on bein' arrested for a while."

"Nonsense!" said Wade. "You don't mean to resist arrest? That's foolish."

"Oh, I dunno," said McHale. "Depends on how you look at it. I ain't goin' to resist to speak of; I'm just lyin' low for a spell. I reckon I'll pack old Baldy with a little outfit, Casey. 'Bout two days from now you'll find him out by Sunk Springs if you ride that way."

"I don't get the idea."

"It's this way," McHale explained. "This Cross is one of a bad bunch. They'll be out for my scalp. They don't want no law in this. I been hearin' 'bout Cross and this old-timer, Dade. They're great tillikums, and Dade is the old he-coon of the bunch. I ain't takin' a chance on some little tin-starred deputy standin' them off. Furthermore, I figure it ain't unlikely they'll come after me some time to-night. If it was just you and me, Casey, we could stand the hand, and whatever hangin' there was would come off in the smoke. But with women on the place it wouldn't be right. So I'll just point out for a little campin' spot somewheres, and save everybody trouble. If any of these here sheriffs or deputies gets nosin' around, you tell 'em

how it is. I'll come in when the signs is right, and not before. Tell them not to go huntin' me, neither, but to go ahead and get everything set for a proper trial. I'll send word when I'll be in."

Wade chuckled. "They can't arrange a trial without somebody to try, Tom."

"They'll have to make a stagger at it, or wait," McHale responded seriously.

It was dusk when he headed westward, old Baldy, lightly packed, trotting meekly at the tail of his saddle horse.

Casey, coming back from a final word with him, met Clyde strolling toward the young orchard. He fell into step.

"Nice evening."

She regarded him quizzically. "I won't ask a single question. You needn't be afraid."

"Did you think I meant to head off your natural curiosity? Not a bit of it. You want to know where Tom is going at this time of night, and why?"

"Of course I do. But I won't ask."

"You may just as well know now as later." He told her what had happened, omitting to mention McHale's real reason for leaving the ranch. Even in the darkness he could see the trouble in her eyes.

"You really mean it?" she questioned. "You mean that he has killed a man?"

"Either that or shot him up pretty badly."

"I can scarcely believe it. I like McHale; he's

droll, humorous, so cheerful, so easy-going. I can't think of him as a murderer."

"Nonsense!" said Casey. "No murder about it. It was a fair gun fight — an even break. This fellow came at Tom, shooting. He had to protect himself."

"He could have avoided it. He had time to get on his horse and ride away. But he waited."

"He did right," said Casey. "This man would have shot him on sight. It was best to settle it then and there."

"That may be so," she admitted, "but life is a sacred thing to me."

"No doubt Tom considered his own life tolerably sacred," he responded. "As an abstract proposition life may be sacred. Practically it's about the cheapest thing on earth. It persists and repeats and increases in spite of war, pestilence, and famine. The principal value of the individual life is its service to other life. Cross wasn't much good. That old Holstein over there in the corral, with her long and honourable record of milk production and thoroughbred calves, is of more real benefit to the world. You see, it was Tom or Cross. One had to go. I'm mighty glad it was Cross."

"Oh, if you put it that way ——"

"That's the way to put it. Of course, we aren't sure that he's more than shot up a little. Still, knowing what Tom can do with a gun, I'm

inclined to think that Cross is all same good Indian."

For some moments they walked in silence. It was rapidly becoming dark. A heavy bank of cloud, blue-black in the waning light, was slowly climbing into the northwestern sky, partially obscuring the last tints of the sunset. The wind had ceased. The air was hot, oppressive, laden with the scents of dry earth. Sounds carried far in the stillness. The stamp of a horse in a stall, the low, throaty notes of a cow nuzzling her calf, the far-off evening wail of a coyote — all seemed strangely near at hand, borne by some telephonic quality in the atmosphere.

"How still it is!" said Clyde. "One can almost feel the darkness descending."

"Electrical storm coming, I fancy. No such luck as rain."

"I don't suppose it affects you," she remarked, "but out here when night comes I feel lonely. And yet that's scarcely the right word. It's more a sense of apprehension, a realization of my own unimportance. The country is so vast — so empty — that I feel dwarfed by it. I believe I'm afraid of the big, lonely land when the darkness lies on it. Of course, you'll laugh at me."

"No," he assured her. "I know the feeling very well. I've had it myself, not here, but up where the rivers run into the Polar Sea. The vastness oppressed. I wanted the company of men and to

see the things man had made. I was awed by the world lying just as it came from the hand of God. The wilderness seemed to press in on me. That's what drives men mad sometimes. It isn't the solitude or the loneliness exactly. It's the constant pressure of forces that can be felt but not described."

"I think I understand."

"The ordinary person wouldn't. There are no words to express some things."

"I'm glad of it; I don't want the things I feel the most cheapened by words."

"Something in that," he agreed. "Words are poor things when one really *feels*. Providence seems to have arranged that we should be more or less tongue-tied when we feel the most."

"Is that the case?"

"I think so — with men, at any rate. It's especially so with most of us in affairs of love and death."

"But some men make love very well, you know," she smiled.

"I defer to your experience," he laughed back.

"Oh, my experience!" She made a wry face. "And what do you know of my experience?"

"Less than nothing. But from some slight observation of my fellow men I am aware that a very pretty and wealthy girl is in a position to collect experience of that kind faster than she can catalogue it."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to do either."

"Referring further to my fellow man, I beg to say that her wishes cut very little ice. She will get the experience whether she wants it or not."

"Accurate observer! Are you trying to flatter me?"

"As how?"

"Do you think me pretty?"

"Even in the darkness ——"

"Be serious. Do you?"

"Why, of course I do. I never saw a prettier girl in my life."

"Cross your heart?"

"Honest Injun — wish I may die!"

"Oh, well," said Clyde, "that's something. That's satisfactory. I'm glad to extract something of a complimentary nature at last. You were far better when I met you at the Wades'. You did pay me a compliment, and you asked me for a rose. Please, sir, *do* you remember asking a poor girl for a rose?"

"I have it still."

"Truly?" A little throb of pleasure shot through her and crept into her voice. "And you never told me!"

"I was to keep it as security. That was the bargain."

"But how much nicer it would be to say that you kept it because I gave it to you. Are you

aware that I made an exception in your favour by doing so?"

"I thought so at the time," said Casey. "I expected a refusal. However, I took a chance."

"And won. Are you sure that you have the rose still? And where among your treasures do you keep it?"

He hesitated.

"You don't know where it is! That's just like a man. For shame!"

"You're wrong," Casey said quietly. "I keep it with some little things that belonged to my mother."

She put out her hand impulsively. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "I — I beg your pardon!"

His strong fingers closed on hers. She did not withdraw her hand. He leaned forward to look into her upraised eyes in the growing darkness.

"That seemed the proper place to keep it. I value your friendship very much — too much to presume on it. We are at opposite ends of the world — I'm quite aware of that. When this little holiday of yours is over you'll go back to your everyday life and surroundings, and I don't want you to take with you one regret or unpleasant memory."

"I don't know what I shall take," she replied gravely. "But I'm not at all sure that I shall go back."

"I don't understand."

"Suppose," she said, "suppose that you were a moderately rich man, in good health, young, without business or profession, without any special talent; and that your friends — your social circle — were very much like yourself. Suppose that your life was spent in clubs, country houses, travel — that you had nothing on earth to do but amuse yourself, nothing to look forward to but repetitions of the same amusement. What would become of you?"

"To be perfectly truthful," he replied, "I should probably go to the devil."

"The correct answer," said Clyde gravely. "*I* am going to the devil. Oh, I'm strictly conventional. I mean that I'm stagnating utterly — mentally, morally, and physically. I'm degenerating. My life is a feminine replica of the one I suggested to you. I'm wearied to death of it — of killing time aimlessly, of playing at literature, at charity, at uplifting people who don't want to be uplifted. And there's nothing different ahead. Must I play at living until I die?"

"But you will marry," he predicted. "You will meet the right man. That will make a difference."

"Perhaps I have met him."

"Then I wish you great happiness."

"And perhaps he doesn't care for me — in that way."

"The right man would. You're not hard to fall in love with, Clyde."

"Am I not — Casey?" She smiled up at him through the dark, a little tremor in her voice. She felt his fingers tighten on hers like bands of steel, crushing them together, and she was conscious of a strange joy in the pain of it.

"You know you are not!" he said tensely. "I could ——" He broke off abruptly.

"Then why don't you?" she murmured softly.

"Why not?" he exclaimed. "I'd look pretty, wouldn't I, a busted land speculator, falling in love with you! I've some sense of the fitness of things. But when you look at me like that ——"

He stooped swiftly and kissed her, drawing her to him almost fiercely. "Oh, girl!" he said, "why did you tempt me? I've forgotten what was due you as my guest. I've forgotten all that I've been remembering so carefully for weeks. Now it's over. Some day the right man will tell you how he loves you."

"I am waiting," she whispered, "for the 'right man' to tell me now!"

"Why," he exclaimed incredulously, "you don't mean ——"

"But I do mean," she replied. "Oh, Casey, boy, didn't you know? Couldn't you guess? Must I do all the love-making myself?"

The answer to this question was in the nature of an unqualified negative, and extended over half an hour. But Casey retained many of his scruples.

He could not, he insisted, live on her money. If he went broke, as seemed likely, he must have time to get a fresh stake. Clyde waived this point, having some faith in Jim Hess. Of this, however, she said nothing to him.

"We had better go," she said at last. "It is quite dark. Kitty will wonder where we are."

"Shall you tell her? Better."

"Not to-night, anyway. She — you see ——"

"She'd jolly you, you mean. Of course. But we may as well have it over."

"Not to-night," Clyde repeated. She was uncomfortably conscious of her confidences to Kitty Wade, made without much thought.

They approached the house from the rear, passing by the kitchen, whence issued the sound of voices.

"Let's take a peep at Feng's company?" Casey suggested.

The kitchen was built apart from the house, but attached to it by a covered way. Standing in the outer darkness, they could look in through the open window without risk of being seen, and were close enough to overhear every word.

Feng was resting from the labours of the day, sitting smoking on the kitchen table. Facing him, a pipe between his wrinkled lips, sat old Simon. His face was expressionless, but his eyes, black, watchful, were curiously alert.

"What foh you come, Injun?" Feng demanded. "Wantee glub? Injun all time *hiyu* eat, all same hobo tlamp. S'pose you hungly me catch some *muckamuck*. Catch piecee blead, catch col' loast beef — loast *moosmoos!*"

"You catchum," Simon agreed. "Casey — where him stop?"

"Casey!" Feng's features expanded in a grin. "Him stop along gal — *tenas klootchman*, you savvy. Go walkee along gal. P'laps, bimeby, two, tlee hou', him come back."

Simon grunted gutturally. "Ya-as," he drawled.

"*Hiyu* lich gal," Feng proceeded. "Have *hiyu* dolla'. You bet. She one *hiyu* dam' plitty gal, savvy?"

"Hush!" Clyde whispered, as Casey would have put an end to this risky eavesdropping. "I didn't think that Feng had such good taste. I'm getting compliments from everybody to-night. I'm really flattered. I want to hear some more."

"Better not," he advised apprehensively.

"But I want to."

"Ya-as," Simon drawled again. "*Hyas kloshe tenas klootchman* — ah-ha. What name you callum?"

"Missee Clyde Bullaby," Feng replied, making a manful attempt at Clyde's surname, which was quite beyond his lingual attainments.

"Clyde!" Simon repeated, in accents of incredulity. "Me savvy 'Clyde.' Him big man-horse

hyas skookum man-horse. Him *mammook* plow, *mammook* haul wagon!"

"You *hyas* damfool Injun!" said his host politely. "Missee Clyde Chlistian gal's name, catchum in Chlistian Bible; all same Swede Annie, all same Spokane Sue, all same Po'tland Lily."

Simon digested this information with preternatural gravity. "Ya-as," said he. "Casey like Clyde?"

"Clyde likee Casey," Feng responded knowingly. "Casey call um woman fliend. Lats! All same big Melican bluff, makee me sick. Bimeby some time she makee mally him. Bimeby baby stop. Then me quit. Me go back to China."

The prophet's last words blurred in Clyde's ringing ears. The friendly darkness hid her flaming cheeks. Why, oh why, had she listened? She was not even shocked by Casey's muttered curse. She felt his hand on her arm, drawing her gently back into the deeper shadows. In silence she followed.

"I'll fire that infernal yellow scoundrel to-morrow," he growled.

"No, no, it was my own fault," she declared. "Absolutely and entirely my own. I — I —— Oh, don't *look* at me, please!"

"I won't," he promised, but his voice shook slightly.

"You're laughing!" she accused him tragically.

"Indeed I'm not," he denied; but with the words

came an involuntary sound strongly resembling a chuckle.

"Shame!" she cried.

"Yes, yes!" he gasped. "I know it. It's too bad. Ha-ha! I really beg your pardon. I —— Oh, good Lord!"

But Clyde gathered up her skirts and fled, whirling up the veranda steps and into the house like a small cyclone, never pausing until a locked door lay between her and a ribald, unfeeling world.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT WAS after midnight when Clyde awoke. She passed from slumber to wakefulness instantly, without the usual intervening stages of drowsiness.

Outside a gale was blowing, and volleys of rain pattered like spent shot on windows and roof. Thunder rumbled ceaselessly. A vivid flash rent the outer darkness, illuminating the room, and the succeeding crack shook the house. It was a storm, rare in the dry belt, of which there were not more than one or two in the year. For Casey's sake she hoped that there would be no hail with it. Better continued drought than a ruinous bombardment of frozen pellets from the heavens which would beat the crops to the ground, utterly destroying them.

As she lay listening she seemed to hear sounds not of the storm, as of some one moving on the veranda. Then came a loud, insistent knocking. She heard the door of Wade's room open, and a long crack of light beneath her own showed that he had lit a lamp.

"Hello! Who's there?" he asked.

The reply was indistinguishable. A violent blow

on the door followed it. She sprang out of bed, threw on a dressing gown, thrust her feet into slippers, opened her door, and peered out.

A single hand lamp on the table showed Wade, clad in pajamas and slippers, standing before the door. His attitude expressed uncertainty. He glanced back and saw Clyde.

"What is it?" she asked. "Who is there?"

"I don't know," he replied. "There are men out there. They want me to open the door. Do you know where there's a gun in the house? I haven't ——"

The impact of a heavy body cut him short. The lock gave way, and the door swung inward. Wade sprang back and caught up a chair. Framed in the door, silhouetted against the outer blackness, appeared a man. His hat was pulled low over his eyes. A handkerchief cut with eyeholes concealed his face. His right hand held a six-shooter, with which he covered Wade. Back of him, pressing forward, were other armed men.

"Put that chair down!" he ordered. "Nobody's goin' to hurt you."

"Glad to hear it!" snapped Wade, who was the fortunate owner of unlimited sand. "What do you mean by breaking into a house in the middle of the night and frightening women? If you want money I've got about fifty dollars, and that's all. You're welcome to it if you'll clear out.

"Keep it," the intruder returned contemptuously. He stepped into the room, followed by four others. "I guess your name is Wade. We don't want you. We want McHale."

"Well, I haven't got him," said Wade.

"Where is he?"

"What do you want with him?"

"That's none of your business."

"All right. If that's so it's none of my business where he is."

"You'd better make it your business," said the other suggestively.

"Well, I won't," Wade retorted. "He isn't here, and that'll have to do you."

"On general principles it don't do to believe a lawyer. Where's Dunne?"

"He isn't here, either."

"I reckon we'll make sure of that." He took a step in the direction of Clyde's room. Wade stepped in front of him.

"No, you don't, my friend," said he. "That room belongs to a lady. You keep out of it."

The leader stopped. "Well," he said, "I don't want to scare no women; but all the same I'm goin' to see the inside of every room in this house. S'pose you knock and tell that lady to fix herself up so's she won't mind my takin' a look in. I'm goin' to make mighty sure her name ain't McHale."

Clyde opened the door, and walked into the room.

She was surprised to find that she was not in the least frightened. Said she:

"Good evening, gentlemen. Do you think I resemble Mr. McHale?"

"No, ma'am," said the leader; "I don't reckon you favour him much."

Admiration was apparent in his voice. Clyde smiled at him.

"Then perhaps you'll take a look at my room now, and allow me to retire again."

"I don't need to look there, ma'am," the man replied. "I'm awful sorry we troubled you."

"That's the way to talk," said a quiet voice from the door.

The leader whirled instantly to look into the ominous muzzle of a heavy automatic held by Casey Dunne.

"Put that gun down, and your hands up!" snapped Casey. "Quick! No nonsense! I'll kill the first man that tries anything."

The quiet had gone from his voice; it bit like acid. Strange, hard lights danced in his eyes. The hand that held the gun had not a tremor. Clyde, looking at him, saw and recognized in his face the cold deadliness which she had once seen in McHale's.

Without an instant's hesitation the leader put his weapon on the table. "You win once," he observed.

"That's sensible," Casey commented. "Now, perhaps you'll tell me what this means?"

"No objection in the world," the other replied coolly. "We wanted to interview McHale."

"Is that so? Well, Tom isn't here to-night Mr. Dade. By the way, unless you really like it you needn't wear that transformation scheme across your face. Same remark applies to the other gentlemen. I like to know my visitors."

Dade laughed, removing the handkerchief. "Take a good look. You may see me again."

"Any time you like, Mr. Dade. And what did you want with McHale?"

"Well," Dade answered calmly, "we figured that he'd help us take the stretch out of a new rope."

"Nobody else would do?" queried Casey.

"We wanted him."

"I see. And had our mutual friend, Mr. Cross, anything to do with your desire? By the way, how *is* Mr. Cross? Or should I say the late Mr. Cross?"

"Not yet," Dade replied. "He's got a chance."

"Then aren't you too previous?"

"McHale laid for him, and plugged him as he came out of Shiller's," Dade declared.

"Cross came out of Shiller's with his gun in his hand to get McHale," said Casey. "McHale was entitled to shoot. It was an even break."

"That's not how I heard it."

"That's what McHale says, and it goes with me."

"It don't go with me," Dade declared. "Me and Cross is partners — has been for years. I'm

out to get McHale, and you can send him word. I reckon he ain't here, or he'd be obvious."

"He'd be mighty obvious," Casey agreed. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Dade, that this feud business makes me tired. It's sinful, and, worse than that, it's out of date. You take notice, now, that we won't stand for it. You've pretty well played out your string here, anyway."

Dade stared at him. "I reckon you'll have to talk a little plainer, Dunne."

"Isn't that plain enough? This shooting was square. You let it go as it lies. Otherwise we'll clean up your whole bunch."

Dade laughed. "That's sure plain," he admitted. "I like nerve, and you've got it a-plenty, but you ain't got me buffaloed at all. You heard what I said. It goes."

"Suit yourself," said Casey. "I'll send McHale word. Anything else I can do for you to-night?"

"Not a thing," Dade replied. "We'll be going — unless you want us to stay. I'm sorry we disturbed the lady, but I sure thought McHale was in here."

"She'll forgive you," said Casey. "That part of it's all right. Better think over what I said. I mean it."

"So do I," said Dade grimly. "You can send McHale word."

As Casey closed the door and set a chair against

it in place of the damaged fastenings, Kitty Wade peeped from her room.

"Are the outlaws g-gone?" she asked.

"They have went," her husband replied. "You are saved, m'dear. Your little heart may now palpitate in normal palps."

His wife, looking altogether charming and girlish, emerged.

"Well, I *was* frightened," she admitted. "I'd give worlds to be as brave as Clyde."

Clyde, feeling Casey's eyes upon her, flushed and gathered her dressing gown closer, conscious for the first time of her attire. "Oh, nonsense, Kitty!" she responded. "I was really shaking in my shoes."

"You didn't show it," Casey commented. "There isn't one girl in a thousand who would have been as cool."

"I agree with you," said Wade. He put his arm around his wife. "Better go back to roost, little girl."

"Not until I hear all about it," said Kitty. "Go and get a bath robe or something, like a good boy. Pajamas are very becoming, and all the best people wear 'em, but ——"

"I beg everybody's pardon!" Wade exclaimed in confusion. "I thought I had on my — er — that is, it never struck me that I wasn't clad in orthodox garments." He was back in a moment, swathed

in a bath robe. "Now, Casey, tell us how you happened to make that stage entrance?"

"Not much to tell about it," Casey replied. "I had an old Indian bedded down in the hay in the stable, and he saw or heard this outfit riding in and woke me up. As a matter of fact, the old boy was just outside with a shotgun all the time. We had that much moral support. He came to tell me that this outfit meant to get Tom."

"This McHale business is serious," said Wade.

"Very serious. I don't mean so far as Tom is concerned; he can take care of himself. But you can see that we can't allow these men to bulldoze us. It's McHale now. To-morrow it may be some one else."

"Yes, I see. But what can you do about it? The law ——"

"It's outside the law," said Casey. "The law is too slow. We'll make our own law. Hello! What's that?"

He jumped to his feet, gun in hand, as the chair set against the door scraped back from it. Out of the darkness staggered Sheila McCrae.

Water dripped from her old pony hat and ran in little rivulets from a long, yellow slicker. From head to foot she was spattered with mud. Her face was pale, drawn, and dirt-smeared, and blood oozed slowly from a jagged cut above her left eye. She swayed from side to side as she walked.

Kitty Wade cried out; Clyde rose swiftly in quick sympathy. But Casey was before her.

"Sheila — girl — what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

She stretched out her arms to him gropingly.

"Where's Tom, Casey? They're after him. Maybe they're after you. Father's hurt. Sandy —— I can't talk, Casey. I guess — I'm — all in."

He caught her as she fell forward, lifting her in his arms as easily as if she had been a child, and laid her on a couch.

"No, no," he said, as Clyde would have put cushions beneath her head. "Let her lie flat." He unbuttoned the slicker, and opened her dress halfway from throat to waist, stripping it away with ruthless hand. A bare shoulder and arm showed bruised and discoloured. "She's been in some mix-up — had a fall or something. Wade, get me some whiskey and water!" His long fingers closed on her wrist. "She'll be all right in five minutes, unless something's broken. Mrs. Wade, get in here and loosen her corsets. Give her a chance."

Kitty stooped obediently, and straightened up in amazement. "Why — she ——"

"Well, how did I know?" snapped Casey. He ran his hand down her side. "No ribs broken; arms all right. Good!"

Sheila's long lashes fluttered against her cheeks, she sighed and opened her eyes.

"Casey," she said, "never mind me. Look out for yourself. Where's Tom? There are men coming to-night. I was afraid ——"

"All right, Sheila," he interrupted. "Tom is safe. The men have gone. No trouble at all. Just lie quiet till things steady a little. Have a drink of this."

Clyde brought water, sponge, and towels. She cleansed Sheila's face and hands, and deftly dressed the cut in her forehead.

"You make me feel like a baby," said Sheila. "I never fainted before in my life. I didn't think I could faint. I'm all right now. May I sit up, please?"

"You may lie up, if you like," Casey replied. "Let me put some pillows under you. You've had a bad shake-up, old girl."

"Beaver Boy fell," she explained, "and threw me. I must have struck my head. I don't know how I caught him again. I don't remember very clearly. I had to hang on to the horn sometimes — dizzy, you know. I never had to pull leather before. He was afraid of the lightning, and I wasn't strong enough to handle him afterward. The fall took it out of me. I just had to let him go. He knew it, and acted mean. I'll show him whose horse he is next time."

"You rode on your nerve," said Casey. "Tell us all about it. Tell us about your father and Sandy. You were going to say something when you keeled over."

The girl's keen face clouded. "Oh, heavens! Casey, my head can't be right yet. I'd clean forgotten my own people. There's been nothing but trouble in bunches all day. The drivers ran away this morning, smashed the rig, threw father out, and broke his leg. This afternoon this man Glass, whom we all took for a harmless nuisance, arrested Sandy."

"What?" Casey exclaimed.

"Yes, he did. Glass is a railway detective. He worked quietly, nosing around the ranches talking to everybody, while the other detective attracted all the attention. Nobody suspected Glass. Who would? Anyway, he and another man arrested Sandy for blowing up the dam."

Casey whistled softly, casting a side glance at Wade.

"Where's Sandy now? Where did they take him?"

Sheila laughed, but there was little mirth in it.

"They didn't take him anywhere, but I don't know where he is. I saw him with the two men down by the stable. I thought they were talking about land. Half an hour afterward he came to the house with his parfleches, and asked me to put him up a couple of weeks' grubstake. He had the

men locked up in the harness room, but he didn't tell me how he had done it. He took his pack horse and his blankets and hunting outfit, and pulled out. I didn't know what to do. I didn't tell the folks. The ranch hands know, but they won't let the men out. And then it must have been after ten o'clock when one of our men told me of the shooting. He had heard it from somebody on the road. He said that Cross' friends were talking of lynching McHale, and perhaps you. I didn't believe it at first, but after a while I got nervous. Everybody was asleep, and anyway there was nobody I could ask to go; so I came myself."

"And Tom and I will never forget it, Sheila," said Casey. "I don't know another girl who could have made it after a fall like that in this storm."

"It was perfectly splendid of you!" cried Kitty Wade, with hearty admiration.

Clyde, obeying a sudden impulse, leaned forward and kissed the bruised forehead. Sheila was unused to such endearments. She had no intimates of her own sex; with the women she was courteously distant, repelling and rather despising them. She had felt Clyde's instinctive hostility, and had returned it. Surprised and touched by her action, the tears started to her eyes. Clyde put her arms around the slender, pliant waist.

"Come with me, dear, and get some sleep. You're badly shaken up. We'll sleep in, in the morning."

"But I have to go back," Sheila objected. "Nobody knows I've gone. I have to be back by morning. And then there's Beaver Boy! My heavens! I left him standing outside. Oh, I've got to ——"

Casey gently pressed her back as she would have risen.

"I'll stable the horse, old girl; and I'll be at Talapus by daylight to tell them where you are. Don't you worry, now, about anything — not even Sandy. If he's gone back to the hills I'll bet he finds Tom. They'll be all right."

"Do you think so, Casey? And will you do that much for me? I'm awfully sore and tired. Every bone and muscle of me aches."

"You poor little girl." He raised her in his arms. "Come on, girls, and put her to bed. I'll carry her in."

CHAPTER XXV

WITH the first streaks of dawn Casey and Simon mounted and rode for Talapus. But before they had ridden five hundred yards Casey discovered an extraordinary thing. In his ears sounded a sustained, musical murmur, nothing less than the happy laugh of running water.

"By the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated. "There's water in the ditches."

Simon nodded. "Ya-as. *Hiyu chuck* stop, all same *skookum chuck*," he observed, signifying that there was a full head of it, like a rapid.

The ditches were running to the brim. After the soaking rain of the night the water was not immediately needed, but it showed that the irrigation company's works no longer controlled the supply. When they reached the river they found a swirling, yellow torrent running yeasty-topped, speckled with débris.

"S'pose cloud *kokshut!*" Simon observed.

"Cloudburst, eh!" said Casey. "Looks like it. Then either the company's dam has gone, or it can't take care of the head."

The former supposition seemed the more likely.

Somewhere up in the heart of the hills the black storm cloud had broken, and its contents, collected by nameless creeks and gulches, had swooped down on the Coldstream, raising it bank high, booming down to the lower reaches, practically a wall of water, against which only the strongest structures might stand. Temporary ones would go out before it, washed away like a child's sand castle in a Fundy tide.

Ignoring trails, they struck straight across country. The land had been washed clean. Beneath the brown grasses the earth lay dark and moist. A hundred fresh, elusive odours struck the nostrils, called forth from the soil by the rare moisture, a silent token of its latent fertility. On the way there were no houses, no fences, no cleared fields. The land lay in the dawn as empty as when the keels of restless white men first split the Western ocean; and more lifeless, for the great buffalo herds that of old gave the men of the plains and foothills food and raiment were gone forever.

The sun was up when they reached Talapus. Mrs. McCrae had just discovered her daughter's absence; and her husband was cursing the leg that held him helpless. Casey told them the events of the night, and Donald McCrae was proud of his daughter, and but little worried about his son.

"Show me another girl would have ridden in that storm!" he exclaimed. "She's the old stock — the

old frontier stock! And Sandy, locking the detective in the harness room!" He chuckled. "Go down and let them out, Casey, and give them breakfast. A fine pair of children we've got, mother."

"Sandy can take care of himself," said Mrs. McCrae practically. "He always did, since he could walk, and he took his own ways, asking nobody. And Sheila, for a girl, is the same. They take after you, Donald, not me. But now, Casey, Mrs. Wade is at Chakchak, isn't she?"

"Mrs. Wade and Miss Burnaby," Casey replied. "It's all right, Mrs. McCrae."

"Sheila needs no chaperon," said her father.

"Not with Casey," said her mother. "But there's the gossip, Donald, and the dirty tongues. It's not like the old days."

"True enough, maybe," McCrae admitted. And he added, when his wife had left the room: "What have they got hold of to arrest the boy, Casey?"

"I don't know," Casey replied. "But we'll face the music, Donald."

When Casey entered the harness room Glass and another man, a stranger, lay in one corner on a heap of sacks. Sandy had done a most workmanlike job, and he had put a neat finish to it by strapping each man to a stanchion with a pair of driving reins.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Casey.

"Is it?" said Glass, sourly. His old hesitating manner had quite vanished.

"Beautiful," Casey replied. "Sun shining, birds singing, crops growing. 'God's in His heaven; all's well with the world.' Like to take a look at it? Or are you too much attached to your present surroundings?"

"You can cut out the funny stuff," said Glass. "I don't ever laugh before breakfast."

"Quite right, too," Casey replied. "Just roll over a little till I get at those knots. There you are, Mr. Glass. Now your friend here. Don't think I know him."

"Jack Pugh, sheriff's officer," said Glass, rising stiffly, with considerable difficulty.

"I'll have him in shape to shake hands in a minute," said Casey, as he worried at the knots. "And so, Mr. Glass, instead of an innocent landlooker you are a real live, mysterious detective. You don't look the part. Or perhaps you are still disguised."

"I can stand a josh better now," said Glass. "Maybe I'm not such a live proposition as I might be. When two grown men let a kid hogtie them it sort of starts them thinking."

"It sure does," Pugh agreed. He was a saturnine gentleman, with a humorous eye. "I been wantin' to scratch my nose for eight solid hours," he affirmed irrelevantly, rubbing that organ violently with his free hand.

"He's some kid," said Glass. "Where is he?"

"I haven't seen him. He left word where to find you."

"Beat it somewhere, I suppose," Glass commented. "He fooled us up in great style, I'll say that much. At first he acted about the way you'd expect a country kid to act — scared to death. He wanted to change his overalls for pants before we took him anywhere. Said they were hanging up in here. We fell for it. We came in, and there was a pair of pants hanging on a nail. He walked over to them, and the next thing we knew he had a gun on us. I hope I know when a man means business — and he did. He had half a notion to shoot anyway."

"That's right," Pugh confirmed. "He's one of them kids that makes gunmen. No bluff. I know the kind."

"So when he told me to tie Pugh I did it," Glass continued. "Then he dropped a loop over me, and that's all there is to tell. The joke's on us just now."

"So it is," said Casey. "Whatever made you think that kid had anything to do with blowing up the dam?"

"Hadn't he?"

Casey smiled genially. "Why, how should I know, Mr. Glass? I was just asking what you were going on."

"I'm not showing my hand. I don't say the kid did it alone."

"And so you thought you'd round him up and sweat some information out of him. That was it, wasn't it?"

"You're quite a guesser and you show a whole lot of interest in the answer," retorted Glass. "Keep on guessing."

"I don't need to. Come up to the house and have breakfast. And for Heaven's sake don't say anything to frighten the kid's mother."

"What do you take us for?" said Glass. "We'll treat the whole thing as a joke — to her."

Casey breakfasted with them, and after they had gone sought Simon. The old Indian, full to repletion, was squatting on the kitchen steps, smoking and blinking sleepily.

"No see um Sandy," he observed. "Where him stop?"

"No more Sandy stop this *illahee*," Casey replied. "Sandy *klatawa kopa* stone *illahee*, all same Tom." Meaning that Sandy had gone in the direction of the hills, as had McHale.

"Why him *klatawa?*" Simon asked.

Casey explained, and Simon listened gravely. His receptiveness was enormous. Information dropped into him as into a bottomless pit, vanishing without splash.

"Sandy *hyas* young fool," he commented. "Me tell him *mamook huyhuy* moccasin. S'pose moccasin stop, *ikt* man findum, then heltopay. Polis-

man *mamook* catchum, put um in *skookum* house, maybeso hang um *kopa* neck."

"What are you talking about, anyway?" Casey demanded. And Simon told him of the track of the patched moccasin and of his warning to Sandy.

Casey immediately fitted things together. He knew that Sandy's right moccasin was almost invariably worn through at the toe. Before the left he had seen him patching them, and because they wore through at the same place the patches were of nearly the same shape. So that if Glass had found a patched moccasin it was not necessarily the one which had made the track. But that would make little difference. Either Farwell or his assistant must have told Glass about this track. If he had found a pair of Sandy's moccasins to correspond with the footprint he had come very near getting Sandy with the goods. But Farwell or somebody must have directed Glass's suspicions to Sandy.

However that was, Sandy had made a clean get-away into a region where he would be hard to catch. He was familiar with the trails, the passes, the little basins and pockets nestling in the hills. He was well provisioned and well armed. And the last caused Casey some uneasiness, for having once resisted arrest Sandy would be very apt to do so again.

"Simon," he said, "I want you to take papah letter to Tom."

"Where Tom stop?" Simon asked naturally enough.

"Maybe at Sunk Springs," Casey replied. "Maybe not. You try Sunk Springs. S'pose no Tom stop there, you *nanitch* around till you find him."

"All right," said Simon. "Me *nanitch*, me find Tom." He considered a moment. "*Halo* grub stop me?"

"I'll tell them to grubstake you here," Casey reassured him. "I'll pay you, too, of course."

"You my *tillikum*," said Simon, with great dignity. "Tom my *tillikum*. Good! Me like you. How much you pay?"

"Two dollars a day," said Casey promptly.

Simon looked grieved and pained. "You my tillikum," he repeated. "S'pose my *tillikum* work for me, me pay him five dolla'."

But Casey was unmoved by this touching appeal to friendship. "I'll remember that if I ever work for you," he replied. "Two dollars and grub is plenty. You Siwashes are spoiled by people who don't know any better than to pay what you ask. That's all you'll get from me. Your time's worth nothing, and your cayuses rustle for themselves."

And Simon accepted this ultimatum with resignation.

"All right," said he. "You my *tillikum*; Tom my *tillikum*. S'pose you catch *hiyu* grubstake."

Having arranged for a message to McHale, it occurred to Casey that he should see whether the sudden rise of the river had swept the company's temporary dam. Accordingly he rode thither.

The storm had entirely passed, and the sun shone brightly. Great, white, billowy, fair-weather clouds rolled up in open order before the fresh west wind, and the shadows of them trailed across the face of the earth, moving swiftly, sharply defined, sweeping patches of shade against the green and gold of a clean-washed, sunny summer world. Off to the westward, where the ranges thrust gaunt, gray peaks against the sky line, the light shimmered against patches of white, the remnants of the last winter's snows. Far away, just to be discerned through a notch in the first range, was a vivid point of emerald or jade, the living green of a glacier.

It was a day when it was good to be alive, and Casey Dunne, hard, clean, in the full power of his manhood, the fresh west wind in his face, and a strong, willing horse beneath him, rejoiced in it.

As he rode his thoughts reverted to Clyde Burnaby. Indeed, she had never, since the preceding night, been entirely absent from them; but because his training had been to do one thing at a time, and think of what he was doing to the exclusion of all else, he had unconsciously pigeonholed her in the back of his mind. Now she emerged.

"Shiner, m'son," he apostrophized his horse, "if

things break right you're going to have a missus. What d'ye think of that, hey, you yellow-hided old scoundrel? And, by the Great Tyee! you'll eat apples and sugar out of her hand, and if you so much as lay back your ears at her I'll frale your sinful heart out with a neck yoke. D'ye get that, you buzzard-head?"

Shiner in full stride made a swift grab for his rider's left leg, and his rider with equal swiftness kicked him joyously in the nose.

"You would, hey? Nice congratulations, you old man-eater. I'll make a lady's horse of you if you don't behave; I sure will. And we'll build a decent house and break two thousand acres, and keep every foot of it as fine and clean as a seed bed, and have it all under ditch, the show place of the whole dry belt. You bet we will. We won't sell an acre. Fancy prices won't tempt us. We'll keep the whole shootin' match till we cash in." His mood changed.

"Cash in! It's funny to think of that, old horse, isn't it? And yet ten years from now you'll be no good, and thirty years from now I'll be near the end of the deal. And Clyde! Why, Shiner, we can't think of her as an old lady, can we? With her smooth cheeks a little withered and the suppleness gone from her body, and her eyes dim and her glorious hair white. Lord, horse, we mustn't think of it! She'll always be the same dear Clyde to us,

won't she? 'Sufficient unto the day,' my equine trial and friend. Others will come after us, and there will be evil-tempered buckskins loping this foothill country and maybe a Casey Dunne cursing them when you and I are ranging the happy hunting grounds!"

Out of the sunlit distances a horse and rider appeared, rapidly approaching. It was Farwell, and, recognizing Dunne, he pulled up.

"In case you don't know it," he said, without preliminary or greeting, "I'll tell you that our dam went out with the flood. You didn't need to use dynamite this time."

"Providence!" Casey suggested.

Farwell's comment consisted of but one word, which, unless by contrast, is not usually associated with providential happenings.

"Call it that if you like," he growled. "We'll get the men responsible for it one of these days."

"You made a beginning with young McCrae," Casey reminded him.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you know that Glass tried to arrest him?"

"What?" cried Farwell.

His surprise was too genuine to be feigned. Thereupon Casey told him what had occurred in the last few hours both at Talapus and Chakchak.

Farwell listened, biting his lips and frowning. And his first words were an inquiry as to Sheila.

"Miss McCrae rode through that storm last night!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord! Is she badly hurt?"

"Only shaken up, I think."

"Thank God for that," said Farwell, with evident sincerity. He hesitated for a moment. "See here, Dunne, do you mind if I ask you an impertinent question?"

"Fire away."

"Are you going to marry her?"

"Certainly not. What put that notion in your head?"

"It got there. You were pretty thick. And if she rode there in that storm — unless she thought a lot of you ——"

"I'm mighty proud of it. We're good friends — like brother and sister. No more. She has the best brand of clean-strain pluck of any girl I know."

"So she has," Farwell agreed. "She's a girl in a million. She's ——" He stopped, reddening.

"By George, Farwell," said Casey, "is it that way with you?"

"She doesn't care a tinker's dam for me," said Farwell bluntly. "That's not saying what I think of her. I'm no ladies' man — don't pretend to be. Let that go. I suppose I'll be blamed for young McCrae's arrest. Well, I didn't know a thing about it. I've tried to give the family a good deal —

better than the rest of you, anyway. I don't like the boy, and he doesn't like me. Pulled a gun on me once — well, never mind that. Here, you've been straight with me, and I'll tell you: When the dam was blown up we found the track of a patched moccasin in soft earth. Keeler took an impression of it, or made a cast or something — I don't know just what, but I do know that he photographed it. Since then I've noticed young McCrae's foot, and I believe he made the track, though it didn't strike me at the time. That was about the only clew we found. Mind you, Dunne, I believe you were in it yourself, but I haven't a thing to go on. If Glass has found a patched moccasin of McCrae's he's pretty near got him to rights. I don't know what he's got, though. About Cross and McHale, I don't care a curse which shot the other. These men — Cross, Dade, Lewis, and some more — were protecting our property. And that's all."

"Not quite all. They blew up our dams."

"Just as man to man," said Farwell, "let me ask you if you expected to run a dynamite monopoly?"

"I'm not kicking," said Casey. "I'm merely stating facts. I can take my medicine."

"You're a good deal of a man," Farwell acknowledged grudgingly. "I hate a squealer. Anyway, it was no part of their job to break into your house. See here, Dunne, the last five minutes has got us better acquainted than the last two months. I'll

fire these fellows to-morrow if you'll promise me that our ditches won't be interfered with again."

"As long as we have water there will be no trouble," said Casey. "I'll promise nothing more."

"That's good for some weeks, anyway," Farwell predicted. "I guess we'll have to fight it out in the end. Still, I'm glad to have had this talk. I like you better than I did. And I can tell you there was lots of room for it — is yet, for that matter. Good-bye."

Without waiting for a reply, he dug a heel into his horse and swept on. Casey watched him go, with a thoughtful smile.

"Odd devil!" he muttered. "Queer combination. I don't like him, but — well, he's a fighter, and I believe he's straight. To think of him being fond of Sheila! I wonder if he has a chance there? She never mentions him now. H'm!" Finding no answer to the question, he wheeled Shiner and headed for home.

CHAPTER XXVI

JUST before utter blackness shut down on the land, Sandy McCrae dismounted and stripped saddle and pack from his horses. He looked up at the sky, shook his head, and, taking a light axe, cut two picket pins; after which he staked the horses out in the abundant pasture at the bottom of the draw, driving the pins in solidly beyond the possibility of pulling. Then he set about making a hasty camp.

Beside him a little spring bubbled out of the bottom of the draw and seeped away under tangled roots and fallen brush. A thirst-parched stranger might have ridden past twenty times on the bench above without suspecting its presence. The faint cattle trail leading to it entered the draw a quarter of a mile away, and led along under low but almost perpendicular banks.

Sandy's camp preparations were simple, but much more elaborate than if the night had been clear. Then he would have made his fire, boiled coffee, spread his bed, and gone to sleep beneath the stars; but because of the ominous storm cloud he constructed a lean-to by driving two forked stakes and

joining them with a crosspiece. From these he slanted two poles to the ground, and on the poles laid a tarp, lashing it in place. The mouth of the lean-to faced away from the cloud bank. In addition it had the partial shelter of cottonwoods in full leaf. In this lean-to he collected his outfit. Next he made a fire and cooked supper. Afterward he smoked, squatting in the mouth of his shelter, staring silently at the dying embers, listening to the rising wind sighing above him sweeping across the bare grasslands, but scarcely fanning the coals in his protected camp.

He felt no loneliness whatever. Solitary camps and the love of them were his by right of inheritance. He neither required nor desired companionship. Fire, food, tobacco, and solitude satisfied his inmost soul. This was the life he loved. The fact that he was a fugitive from the law did not trouble him at all; it merely gave an added zest to the situation. Just once he chuckled grimly as he recalled the faces of Glass and Pugh when he had whirled on them, gun in hand. Glass had interpreted his intentions very correctly; he would have shot either or both on the slightest provocation. He was of the breed of the wolf, accustomed from childhood to deadly weapons, brought up in tradition of their use, and, like many outlaws who have bulked large in the history of the West, young enough to act on impulse without counting the ultimate cost.

As his little fire burned down he stepped out and regarded the darkened heavens. A heavy drop of rain struck his face and a flash of lightning ripped the black curtain, outlining bare banks, trees, and grazing horses for a brief instant. Sandy shrugged his shoulders philosophically. His shelter was good enough. He unrolled his bed, and, by the simple process of removing moccasins and gun belt, was ready to retire. He got into his blankets, taking his gun with him, and rolled them around him, leaving his face exposed until the last.

"Now, darn you rain!" he muttered. With which "now-I-lay-me" he drew the blanket completely over his head as a protection against mosquitoes, and, heedless of the smothering effect of it, which would have been unsupportable to a city youth, was asleep in ten seconds.

He slept for, perhaps, an hour. At the end of that time he suddenly became wide awake. He could not have told what had aroused him, but he was sure something had. He threw back the smothering blanket from his head and lay listening.

Overhead the wind threshed the tops of the trees, and roared hollowly as it rebounded from the farther side of the gulch. Rain, driven by the wind, slashed through the foliage and pattered against his primitive shelter. Thunder rolled in an endless fusillade, punctuated by flashes of lightning. But Sandy, without considering the matter, was quite sure that

none of these things had awakened him. In a momentary lull of the storm, as he lay with his ear close to the ground, he thought he could hear the sound of hoofs coming up the draw, along the hard-beaten cattle trail.

It was barely possible that some wandering stock, drifting with the storm, were seeking the shelter of it; but it was more likely that range stock would have found cover to suit them before dark, and would stay in it till morning. Now, there is a difference between the tread of ridden and riderless animals, and Sandy thought that he had heard the former. Also, they were coming as he had come.

His route led from the settlements back to the hills where there was nobody and nothing. There was no road, no trail. Few people went there, not even Indians, and they not until the fall hunt, after the first snow. Therefore, it was suspicious that, on such a night, a rider or riders should be in his vicinity. His mind leaped to the conclusion that Glass had been released, had secured the services of somebody who knew the country, and had somehow made a good guess at the location of his first night's camp, for which they were now searching in the darkness, hoping that the remains of his fire would betray him.

As he reached this conclusion, Sandy rolled out of his blankets, buckled his belt around his lean

waist, slipped on his moccasins, and stepped out into the darkness.

Not a red spark showed where his fire had been, and Sandy smiled grimly. He would do all the surprising himself. He did not intend to be taken. Once more he heard the sound of hoofs, nearer. They seemed to approach a few yards, then to stop. He heard the sound of a breath blown from a horse's nostrils.

The storm, which had lulled momentarily, began again. The wind hit the draw viciously, with spatters of rain. Other sounds were indistinguishable. Sandy, crouching low to get any advancing object against what sky line there was, made out the shape of a mounted man. Horse and man stood like an equestrian statue, barely distinguishable, though but a few yards away.

The rider disappeared from the saddle. Sandy heard his feet crashing in the low bushes, heard him stumble and swear.

"Ought to be about here," words came faintly to Sandy's ears. "If ever I try to find . . . . . on a night like this . . . . . ."

"Looking for me, sure," thought Sandy. "Maybe it's Glass; maybe it isn't. Wonder how many there are. Anyway, I'll fix this one."

Soft-footed as a great cat, he crept toward the voice. The man loomed in front of him; his back was turned. Sandy rose soundlessly behind him.

With a sudden vicious sweep his left arm shot across the stranger's left shoulder and around his throat. His right hand shoved the muzzle of his gun beneath the man's right ear.

"Don't move or let one yip out of you!" he hissed tensely.

After one convulsive start the stranger stood motionless. "Nary move nor yip," he whispered confidentially into the night. "And if that gun's a light pull, be mighty careful of the trigger!"

"Talk and talk quiet," said Sandy. "How many are there of you?"

"Be mighty careful of that gun if you're seein' double that way!" the stranger admonished again nervously. "Was you expectin' twins or somethin'?"

"You alone?"

"Yep."

"What's your name?"

"Smith."

"What you doing here?"

"Lookin' for the spring to camp by."

"Where you heading for?"

"Into the hills, prospectin."

"Where's Glass?" Sandy asked suddenly.

"Search me. I got nothin' to do with that durn fool."

The tone and the words gave Sandy the surprise of his life. His arm dropped away from the

stranger's throat, and his gun ceased to threaten the base of his skull.

"Tom McHale!" he cried.

"You sound some like a *cultus* young devil named McCrae," said McHale, peering at him in the dark. "Say, what in the flarin' blazes you doin' here?"

"Take some yourself," Sandy responded. "Are they after you, too?'

McHale shook his head sadly. "Sonny," said he, "you're too young to be havin' them cute little visions of things bein' after you. I reckon maybe we're pullin' two ways on one rope. Also, we ain't gettin' no drier standin' here chewin' about it. Maybe you got a camp somewheres. S'pose you find the latchstring. Then we'll have a talk."

Thus admonished, Sandy led the way to his lean-to, rekindled the fire, helped picket McHale's horses, and set the coffee-pot to boil. They drank coffee and smoked, going into details of their experiences of the preceding day. McHale was amazed to hear of Sandy's arrest by Glass, whom he had held in contempt. Sandy was jubilant over the shooting of Cross, regretful that he had not had a hand in it.

"You won't be so durn stuck on a gun fight after you've been in one or two," said McHale grimly. "Now let's see how she stacks up. I'm goin' to

hide out for a spell, but if I was you I'd go back and stand the racket."

"I guess *not*," said Sandy positively. "I don't want to do time if they've got me with the goods. And then some darn lawyer might make me give somebody else away by accident. You can't tell. I'll stay out with you. Where are you heading for?"

"I was aimin' to hit Bull's Pass, drop over the summit into the valley of the Klimminchuck, and camp somewheres. There was two trappers in there winter before last, and they told me they built them a right good cabin."

"That suits me."

"This will fix us up with water for the next two weeks," said McHale as he listened to the rain. "I'll bet Casey's got a grin on him a yard wide." He yawned. "Well, kid, we've got all that's comin' to us out of this one day. Let's hit them blankets. We better make an early start."

They were up in the early dawn, breakfasted, saddled, and packed, and headed for the hills. At noon they reached the foot of the pass. A narrow trail, often choked by fallen timber and small landslides, led them upward, winding in and out, sometimes near the bottom of an always ascending gorge, sometimes forsaking it for broad, flat benches parklike with stately trees, sometimes clinging precariously to shoulders of bare rock where a slip would have been fatal.

They camped that night near the summit, and next day dropped down into a valley, narrow, wooded, picturesque, where the Klimminchuck raced southward; and, following its course, camped at the edge of a beaver meadow, feasting on trout fresh caught from a deep pool beneath a short fall. And in the morning, still following the stream, they came to the trappers' cabin, set in a grove of young spruce.

It was built of small logs chinked with moss and clay, and most of the chinking had fallen out. Its roof was of poles covered with earth. A two-man bunk occupied much of the interior. The remainder was taken up by a rough table, a bench, and a rusty wreck of a little sheet-iron stove. There was room to get in and stay in, and that was all. And yet two men had lived in that pen all winter, and emerged healthy and fairly good-tempered in the spring.

The companions peered through the door at the uninviting interior. The floor was a litter of rubbish, old clothes in a state of decomposition, leaves, bones, and rusty cans and pans. Young McCrae wrinkled an outraged nose.

"Pfaugh!" he snorted. "The shack's filthy. We can't use it."

"The smell *is* some obvious," McHale agreed. "Which bein' so, I reckon we build us a wickiup several nose lengths off."

They found a suitable spot, and there they built an elaborate lean-to. Having established themselves, they rested, smoked, and slept. In the evening they caught trout for supper and breakfast. There was absolutely nothing to do unless they created employment for themselves.

At the end of another day Sandy became restless; his capacity for loafing was exhausted.

"Let's go get a bear," he proposed.

"Deer's better meat," said McHale; "also easier to get. I won't climb after no bear."

Nevertheless, he accompanied Sandy down the valley. They saw no bear; but they shot a young buck, and returned to camp with the carcass lashed behind Sandy's saddle. Although it was closed season, they needed the meat, and game wardens were not likely to intrude.

But when they came in sight of their camp they saw old Simon reclining in grandeur on their blankets, smoking.

"The nerve of that buck!" snorted McHale. "Get off of that bed, you old copperskin. Think I want to wash them blankets?"

Simon obeyed, but he drew a letter from his pocket.

"Papah," said he. "Casey."

McHale read Casey's warning as to Dade, and whistled softly, passing the letter to Sandy.

"So this here Dade makes it a feud, does he?"

he said meditatively. "All right, he can have it that way. Same time, I'm goin' to keep out of trouble long as I can. I'll stay cached mighty close, and I'll run like blazes before I'll fight. Simon, how'd you find this camp?"

"Find um easy," said Simon scornfully. He pointed to the carcass of the deer. "S'pose you *mamook* cook um."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE morning Sheila awoke stiff and sore, but rested. Her strong young body, hard and well conditioned by a life in the open and much healthy exercise, refused to indulge in the luxury of after effects of shock. Looking around, she found that her clothes were gone. But spread ready for her was a dainty morning costume, which she knew for Clyde Burnaby's. Dressing quickly, she entered the breakfast room.

Clyde, sitting by the window, rose, smiling, as she entered.

"I hope they fit," she said. "How do you feel, Miss McCrae?"

"They fit very well, and I feel first rate," said Sheila. "I'm sore in spots, but I'll limber up when I get moving. Where is Mrs. Wade? I suppose Casey has gone to Talapus."

"Kitty's busy cleaning your riding clothes," Clyde replied. "Casey has gone; I haven't seen him."

It was the first time she had used his given name to a third person. It slipped out naturally, and she coloured a trifle, but Sheila did not appear to

notice. They breakfasted together, and later sat on the veranda enjoying the perfect morning after the storm. Naturally, they spoke of the events of the preceding day and night. Sheila took a practical view.

"It was lucky Tom McHale wasn't here," she said. "Somebody would have been hurt. That's what I was afraid of."

"It was very brave of you," said Clyde. "I admire you more than I can say. I want you to know it, Miss McCrae."

"Oh, that" — Sheila dismissed the warm praise with a wave of her brown hand — "why, it wasn't anything; only a wet ride in the dark. If my horse had kept his feet it would have been all right. I simply had to come. Don't try to make me think myself a heroine. You'd do the same thing yourself for a friend."

"I'm afraid I couldn't. I'm not much of a rider, and I couldn't have found my way in the dark."

"Well, that's no credit to me. I've been riding all my life, and I know every foot of this country. Of course, I'd do anything for Casey or Tom."

"Yes," said Clyde, "they both think a great deal of you, I know."

"No more than I think of them — especially Casey. Some day I suppose he'll get married, and then I'll have to call him 'Mr. Dunne.'"

"That won't be necessary."

"Oh, yes, it will. His wife wouldn't stand for 'Casey.'"

"Yes, she will," said Clyde. Sheila turned and looked at her keenly. "We are going to be married," Clyde added.

"You don't mean it!" Sheila exclaimed. "Well, you are a lucky girl, if you don't mind my saying so. Casey's *white*. I congratulate you with all my heart. And he's lucky, too; yes, he is."

"You — you don't mind?" Clyde ventured. She thought it quite possible that Sheila might care for Casey, although convinced that he did not love her.

"Mind? Why should I mind?"

"You know I thought once" — Clyde hesitated — "you see you were such great friends ——"

"You thought I might be fond of him? Why, so I am. Not in that way, though. I might have been if he had tried to make love to me, but he never did. You see, Miss Burnaby ——"

"I wish you'd call me Clyde."

"If you'll call me Sheila. You see, Clyde, Casey and I are too much two of a kind. We'd never get on. You'll idealize him; I'd call him down. He'll talk out of his heart to you; he'd talk irrigation, and crops, and horses to me. You'll accept his judgment in most things as final; I'd want him to take my opinion instead of his own. Oh, we'd make an awful mess of it! And so, my dear, don't you think that I'd want his love, even if I could get it.

But at that he's the whitest man I know, and the best friend I ever had. You're lucky. I don't wonder that he fell in love with you, either. I wish to goodness *I* were as pretty."

"I'm glad," said Clyde, "that you haven't said anything about money. Thank you."

"It's not because I didn't think of it," Sheila admitted frankly. "But I know it makes no difference to Casey. Fact is, I wonder, knowing him as I do, that he hadn't some absurd scruples on that point."

"He had. He says we can't be married if he loses this ranch and the other lands."

"Nonsense," said Sheila practically. "He won't stay with that if you coax him; he couldn't."

Clyde laughed happily. "That's the nicest compliment I ever had. You're absolutely the first person I've told."

"Well, I'm much flattered," said Sheila. "When did it happen?"

"Last night."

"Everything happened last night. Was he — er — convincing in the part?"

But Clyde, laughing and blushing, refused details. Sheila wished to go home at once, but Clyde prevailed on her to wait for Casey. It was his wish.

"And that settles it from your point of view, of course," said Sheila. "Well, I'll wait."

Casey returned at noon. Clyde met him halfway

between the stable and the house, bareheaded, the fresh wind fluttering her skirts and spinning little tendrils of coppery gold across her forehead. He would have taken both her hands, but she put them behind her, laughing.

"Not here, sir!"

"It's my ranch and my girl."

"In order of merit?"

"My girl and my ranch, then. But tell me: How is Sheila?"

"Quite well, except for her bruises. What a plucky girl she is, Casey!"

"I should say she is," he agreed heartily. "You must be friends. Somehow you never seemed to like her."

"I understand her better now. I've told her about — us."

"Fine! And Kitty Wade?"

"Yes. Come in and face the music yourself."

But Casey got off lightly. They lunched without Wade, who had gone to town for mail; but as they were finishing the meal he entered.

"Casey," he cried, "I hope to Heaven I haven't foundered your horse, but I have all kinds of news for you!"

Casey's mouth tightened a little. "Let it go, Wade. Maybe it's all for the best."

"Part of this is, anyway. Don't look so glum; it's all right, I tell you. Now, this was the way

of it: When I got my papers at the post office I saw that Western Air stock, which had been playing antics before, had gone clean crazy. It's been boosted sky high. All sorts of rumours, the chief being that the Hess System people were responsible. So I wired for the latest. Got a reply that it was impossible to confirm rumours. Then, just as I was leaving, in comes a wire for Clyde which I herewith produce and put in as Exhibit A, and which, I strongly suspect, throws light on the situation. Open it, Clyde, for Heaven's sake, and put us out of our misery!"

Clyde tore the envelope with fingers which trembled slightly. She read the message and handed it to Casey.

"Aloud?" he asked, and she nodded. He read:

Sending you power of attorney and proxy to vote shares recently purchased by your brokers. We now control corporation. Advise friends to drop lawsuit. They will get a square deal. Jim.

Casey looked up. He did not understand. Wade struck him a violent blow on the back.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "It's blamed unprofessional, but I was never so glad to discontinue an action in my life. Clyde, you're a darling!" He caught her in his arms and whirled her around the room.

"Harrison!" Kitty cried, "have you gone crazy?"

Wade released Clyde, breathless, and sank into a chair.

"Bring me an expensive drink!" he commanded. "This needs celebrating."

"Will somebody tell me what's the matter with him?" Casey asked.

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Don't you see it?"

"Not yet," Casey admitted.

"Why, you old dub," cried Wade, "the wire is from Jim Hess, Clyde's uncle. His interests control Western Air. He promises you a square deal."

"Eh!" Casey ejaculated, staring at him.

"You blamed idiot!" snapped the lawyer, "why don't you thank Clyde? She started the old chief on the warpath after York's scalp."

Casey turned to her. "Tell me he isn't raving mad! Is it so?"

"It's so," she said, "but I ——" He interrupted by catching her in his arms.

"Here, hold on, old man!" Wade protested. "Gratitude's a fine thing, but you're too ——"

His wife took him by the arm. "Come on, Harrison, you stupid! You're worse than he is. Can't you understand anything?" Sheila's skirts were already fluttering through the door.

"Great Scott!" Wade exclaimed, "you don't mean ——"

"You — you *bonehead!*" she cried, exasperated, and hustled him outside.

Careless of them, Casey held Clyde, looking down into her eyes. "Sweetheart," he said, "you never told me!"

"I was afraid."

"Of raising false hopes?"

"Not that, so much. But you wouldn't let me help you with money. And I was afraid that if you knew, you'd consider yourself under an obligation and wouldn't — wouldn't ——"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Wouldn't be sensible and tell me you loved me," she said softly. "You're so funny about such things, Casey. You aren't angry now, are you?"

"Angry?" he said. "Dear, I'd put the savings of years into this land — years when I'd worked like a very slave to get enough cash together to swing some good deal when I should see it. That was my stake. And the others! Why, girl, you've saved Talapus to the McCraes, and their ranches for the men who made them. We can't repay you; we won't try."

CHAPTER XXVIII

EXCUSE *me*," said Wade, who had anticipated his entrance by many preliminary noises, "excuse me, my dear young friends, and, incidentally, accept my sincerest congratulations, felicitations, and — er — jubilations. Kindly listen to the following observations. Ahem! Far be it from me to horn in where I am as welcome as a wet dog. Nothing is farther from my desire than to short circuit two hearts ——"

"Come right in, old man," said Casey. "What's the trouble?"

"I want my dinner," said Wade plaintively. "I Paul Revered on a shoestring. I Sheridaned without a commissariat. I brought the good news to Ghent on an empty tummy. Is thy servant a dog, that he should eat with a Chinaman? And I'd do that willingly; but, Casey, you know as well as I do that the only thing fit to drink Clyde's health in is in this room, and I warn you that if there is much more delay in doing so nothing which may occur hereafter will be either lucky or legal. While it is possibly true that a dinner of herbs where love is has a porterhouse, rare, and hashed

brown spuds backed clean off the board, I submit, not being in love myself ——"

"What's that?" cried Kitty Wade from the door.

"Why, it's a shame!" said Clyde. "He must be starving. It's all Casey's fault, too."

"Wouldn't he break away?" asked Wade. "I remember ——"

"Harrison!" cried Kitty, warningly.

"Well, then, do I eat?" he demanded.

"Yes. Anything to keep you quiet. I'll get your dinner myself."

Half an hour later Wade pushed back his chair with a sigh of satisfaction, lit a cigar, and joined the others.

"I feel better," he announced. "A child could play with me in comparative safety. Now let me tell you what else I discovered. In the first place, Cross is dead. I was talking to Shiller. He says that Tom wasn't to blame — corroborates his story, in fact, in every material particular. So Tom's all right on that score. My advice to him would be to come in and have his trial over."

"That isn't what's bothering him so much. It's these friends of Cross's. I don't blame him. Some sheriffs are mighty weak-kneed about such things."

"Well, I'm told that officers will be after him. Now as to your brother, Miss McCrae: Glass and Pugh are starting out to find him as soon as they get an outfit. Likely they've got started now."

"But they don't know where he is. That Glass — I should think he'd get lost if he left a trail."

"Pugh is different. They may get another man or two."

"I hope they don't find him," said Sheila gravely.

"So do I," Wade concurred. "I don't suppose a prosecution would be pushed now; but he resisted an officer, and anyway I wouldn't like to see him under arrest."

"You don't understand. Sandy wouldn't submit quietly."

"You think he'd try to bluff them again?"

"He isn't a bluff," said Casey. "The kid is serious-minded. That's the trouble. However, I've sent Tom word about Dade. Sandy may be with him; and Tom is cool. When Simon comes in we'll know more, and send him out again if he knows where the boy is."

Sheila declared that she must be going home. She refused Casey's offer to drive her over. She wanted to take the edge off Beaver Boy. His actions rankled in her mind. He needed a lesson, and she was going to give him one. And she refused absolutely to allow Casey to ride with her.

He had her horse saddled, and was giving a final pull at the latigos when she came out in her riding clothes.

"Cinch him up tight," she commanded. "Take a good pull at it; he's getting too foxy."

Beaver Boy grunted as Casey put his strength on the strap and the broad cinch bit into his glossy skin.

"And that's loose a-plenty," said his mistress. "He blows himself up like a turkey gobbler. I need a block and tackle to cinch him right." She shaded her eyes with her hand. "Somebody coming. I'll wait and see who it is."

Much to their surprise, it was none other than Farwell. He rode briskly, head up, shoulders back, with the air of a man whose mind is made up. But he refused to get off his horse, asking Sheila's permission to ride with her.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, "that you'll have water for the summer anyway. I've just had a wire from headquarters to shut down, and to turn the normal flow of the river back into its old channel." He smiled grimly. "They didn't know that the elements had attended to that. Thought you'd like to know. Might save you worry. Don't know the company's reason, and it's none of my business. I'm paying off the whole outfit to-night, including the men we were speaking of. To-morrow I'll pull out myself. Glad to do it."

"Sorry to have you go," said Casey.

"You say it all right, but I know better," said Farwell bluntly. "I don't want to keep Miss McCrae waiting. Will you shake hands?"

Casey put out his hand. It was caught, thumb

crotch to thumb crotch, in a grip of steel. He laughed as he threw every ounce of strength into his own fingers.

"Good man," said Farwell. "I like a man with a handgrip, and you've got it. Any time you're ready, Miss McCrae?"

Sheila went up as lightly as a boy. Beaver Boy was off as she touched the saddle. Farwell followed. They melted into the distance, galloping side by side, the dust, in spite of the night's rain, puffing up from the flying hoofs.

At the end of a mile Beaver Boy's exuberance had not subsided. He thrashed out with his heels, and gave a tentative pitch. Farwell, who had been riding slightly behind, ranged up alongside.

"I should think you'd get a quiet horse," he said.

"I'll make this one quiet!" snapped Sheila, for she was still sore, and the hard pace had told on her temper through her bruises. "He's actually beginning to think he can do as he likes with *me*." Beaver Boy shied to show his independence, and she slashed him mercilessly with the quirt, setting her teeth as he plunged. "You would, would you, you brute? I'll show you!"

Farwell, riding in, grabbed for the headstall.

"Get away!" she flamed. "I'll fight this out with him now."

The question of supremacy took five minutes to settle. At the end of that time Beaver Boy relapsed

ignominiously into servitude, smarting from the quirt and dripping sweat. Sheila put all her strength into a final cut. The big bay took it meekly with what was almost a sigh and a trembling quiver.

Farwell had watched the struggle with anxiety. "You won't have any more trouble with him for a while. He's afraid of you now."

"He'd better be. He's been obstinate for months, getting worse all the time. He had some notion in his head that he was merely *allowing* me to ride him. He did what he liked for a while last night when I was shaken up, and he had to have his lesson. No use letting any one else give it to him. He had to be shown that *I* was able to do it."

"That's so," said Farwell, "that's sense. The idea of you going out in the storm last night on that brute. No other girl would have done it. It was fine, but it was foolish."

"Nonsense! I'm not afraid of rain or a horse. Could I do anything else? It was up to me."

"Maybe. Well, you heard what I told Dunne about the water. That ought to be satisfactory to all you people."

"Naturally I'm glad."

"I'm going away," he continued. "Also, I'm chucking up my job. I'm sorry I ever took it. It was sheer waste of time. I'm going to work for myself now. I hoped I would catch you at Dunne's place. I wanted to say good-bye."

"I am sorry you are going."

"That's what Dunne said — and he didn't mean it. Do you?"

"I usually mean what I say."

"Well, I didn't know. I wouldn't blame you if you were glad. I behaved like a — well, like a blackguard once."

"We needn't talk about that," said Sheila quietly. "That's over; I don't think of it."

"But I do. I'm rough, but I'm not that kind — usually. You let me down easy. If I could undo it I would; but I can't."

"No, it can't be undone. Why talk about it?"

"Because I keep thinking about it. I've kept away, as you wanted me to — and because I was ashamed of myself. Honestly, I've tried to do the best I could for your people — for your father. I tried my best to be a friend. And the end of it was that I started gossip, and you told me to keep away. That was pretty hard lines. It made me angry. And then I was jealous of Dunne."

"He is going to marry Miss Burnaby."

"Lucky devil!" growled Farwell dejectedly. "Things run smooth for *him*. I'll bet he doesn't think half as much of her as I do of you."

Sheila smiled for the first time. "You wouldn't tell her that."

"I'd tell it to anybody. It's a fact. Why, look here: I'm a practical man; I've no more imagina-

tion than a stump. And yet I've lain awake nights pretending to myself that you had let me kiss you willingly. How's that?"

Sheila laughed softly. "That's certainly going some, Mr. Farwell!"

"Well, it's what I do, anyway. It's about all the consolation I've got."

"Is it? Couldn't you get something better than that?"

"I could if you'd give me half a chance," he declared. "You turned me down hard and cold. There's a fine show for consolation, isn't there?"

"Perhaps some other girl ——?" she suggested demurely.

"No!" Farwell rapped out bluntly. "I don't want any other girl. I don't like other girls. They make me tired. I'd rather work than fuss with them. It's easier. If I can't have you I don't want anybody."

Sheila laughed again. The colour was high in her cheeks, and a strange light was shining in her clear eyes. She shot a glance at him, half amused, half serious.

'And if you had me you'd be tired of me in no time. I'm just plain girl."

"Plain girl nothing! You're the prettiest ——"

"I'm not; I'm not even average."

"And the best and the most sensible and the pluckiest one I ever saw," he pursued, unheeding.

"Don't tell me; I know. I've seen whole rafts of women. Dolls! Flirts! Gigglers! Fainters! Talking slush and thinking slop! Soft, too, like dough. Eating filthy coloured and flavoured glucose by the pound. Yah! Not a sane idea, or a sound digestion, or a healthy body in the bunch. And as for dress, the average woman piles a lot of truck on her like a *klootch* at a potlatch, and cinches herself up in a ——"

"Hush!" said Sheila.

"Huh!" said Farwell. "Why shouldn't I call things by their names? I never could see ——"

"You aren't supposed to see. That's plenty. I won't be lectured on the follies of my sex."

"You're different from the others," said Farwell. "That's just it. You've got ideas apart from dress and gossip, the same as a man has. You're in good hard condition physically. You don't giggle, and titter, and make eyes, and expect a man to talk like a da — er — ah — that is, you don't expect a lot of silly compliments. I've never seen anybody like you. Talk of another girl! Bah! I couldn't stand one in the same house. It's you or no one."

"I don't think I'd wear well, Mr. Farwell. You'd get tired of me."

"No, I wouldn't; no, I wouldn't. I know what I'm talking about. I tell you, I love you, Sheila. Do you think it's easy to say good-bye and leave you? It's the hardest job I ever had. It's — it's —

oh, it's hell, that's what it is. I used to love work just for the work's sake. But now, to think of grubbing away year after year, to get money that I can't use, that I don't want — that can't get me what I want! Oh, Lord! the hopeless years ahead! What's the good of them? What's the use? I wish I'd never seen this place — or you."

His deep voice rose, and fell, and rumbled uncertainly, shaken by feeling. He slouched dejectedly in his saddle, looking straight ahead as if his eyes beheld the emptiness of the years to come.

"Then why do you say good-bye?" said Sheila.

Farwell started, half turning in the saddle. "Why? Because it's best. What's the use of hanging around? I have to take my medicine, don't I? I can take it easier away from here."

"I'm not so sure," she said hesitatingly, "that there will be any medicine to take."

Farwell's eyes opened wide as he stared at her.

"What do you mean by that? Don't fool with me, Sheila, for Heaven's sake. It's too serious a matter."

"Yes, it's serious," she agreed. She faced him frankly, the rich blood mounting beneath the tan of her cheeks. "What's the use of beating around the bush? When you kissed me I hated you. I struck you. But when Sandy came — and afterward — you seemed a good deal of a man. And so — I don't know — but it need not be good-bye for good."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE evening a stranger drove up to Chak-chak. He was long and lean, and his hair was flecked with gray. His eyes were blue and clear, set rather wide apart, holding a calm, disconcerting stare. His clothes were much worn, frayed, and dusty. His movements were quiet and deliberate, and so was his speech.

"I am lookin'," he said, "for Mr. Dunne."

"That's my name," said Casey.

"Then I'd like a little private talk with you. My name is Dove; I'm actin' sheriff of this county while Fuller's sick." Evidently Acting Sheriff Dove was a man of direct speech.

"Glad to meet you, sheriff," said Casey. "Come right into my quarters. I've guests at the house, and I'm bunking here. Have a cigar, and tell me what I can do for you."

The sheriff lit a cigar very deliberately, and carefully pinched out the flame of the match with his fingers, surest of signs of one accustomed to the plains and woods. He removed the cigar, eyed it with approval, replaced it, and turned to his host.

"That's a right good smoke. I come to see you

about this killin'. This here McHale worked for you, I'm told."

"He's my foreman."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"He come back here after the killin', collected up his outfit, got a pack horse, and made his getaway?"

"Yes."

"Told you about it, maybe?"

"Yes."

"But not where he was goin'?"

"No."

"Still, you can make a tol'able guess."

"I'm not guessing," Casey replied. "That killing was square, sheriff."

"I don't say it wasn't," Dove admitted. "I got nothing to do with that. My rule is, when there's a killin', to bring in the man who done it, and let the law 'tend to his case."

"Good rule, theoretically."

"And so," Sheriff Dove continued, with calm finality, "I'm out to bring in this here McHale."

Casey thereupon gave Tom's reasons for leaving, and expressed his opinion that he would come in and give himself up within a short time. The sheriff listened, smoking impassively.

"I dunno but what McHale acted pretty sensible," he commented. "He needn't worry about my not

protectin' him. I've give a prisoner a gun and let him help stand off a mob before now. Likewise, I've got lead in my system doin' it. However, that ain't the point. I can't wait 'round for him to come in. I got to get him. There's been quite a bunch of things happenin' down in this country, far as I can hear, that ain't none too law-abidin'."

Casey merely smiled genially.

"Mind you, I ain't no busybody," said the sheriff. "I get trouble enough in a regular way without huntin' for it. I've been hearin' things, but there bein' no complaint I've sat tight. Up to this Cross killin' nobody's been hurt. But that's serious and brings me in to take a hand. One of my deputies, Jack Pugh, is after a young feller named McCrae. There's lots of things don't speak well for respect for the law down here. I represent the law, and what hits it hits me."

"I understand. You've been straight with me, sheriff, and I appreciate it. I don't know exactly where McHale is, but I think if you found him and gave him a straight, decent talk he'd come in without any trouble. He doesn't want any. And I think you'll find him somewhere in the hills. That's all I can tell you now."

"Him and this young McCrae is tillikums, they tell me," the sheriff suggested. "You think maybe they've met up?"

"They may. There's a chance of it."

The sheriff considered. "This McCrae is a leetle mite headstrong, I'm told. Sorter apt to act rash."

"I'm afraid so."

The sheriff shook his head regretfully. "I'd ruther deal with a sure 'nough bad man than with a young feller like that," he observed. "They lack judgment, as a rule. I'm told he savvies a gun right well?"

"He's a centre shot and quick," said Casey. "And, remember this, sheriff, if you run across him: he doesn't bluff. When he goes after a gun he goes after it to shoot with. I tell you this because I don't want to see anybody hurt. There's no harm in him, handled right, but he's a kid, and you want to make allowances."

"I'm obliged to you, and I'll do it. Jack Pugh and Glass have started out after him already. They allow to prospect 'round in the hills till they find him. That's what I'll do with McHale."

Casey considered, and suddenly came to a decision.

"Anybody going with you?"

"No."

"Don't you want a deputy?"

"Any time I got to pack a deputy 'round with me to bring in one man there'll be a job open," the sheriff returned grimly. "I don't keep no corral full of deputies. I got Pugh and another, and they're both

busy. I allow not to get lost. I've been out by myself before now."

"The reason I ask," said Casey, "is that I'd like to go with you myself. The boys might listen to me, and not to you. Mind, I'm not offering to guide you to them. You find your own trail. But I'll make all the peace talk I can if you do find them. Besides, there's this Dade. If he goes after Tom, there will be trouble. It's a feud. I declare myself in on it."

"I hate trouble and I love peace," said the sheriff. "No feuds is goin' to flourish around where I am. But you come along. You're actin' right. I'm glad to have you. Can you start in the mornin'?"

"Make it afternoon; I've things to see to first. How are you fixed for a horse?"

"I've got my own hoss back yander in town. I hated to use him till I had to. That's why I hired a team."

"I have a pack horse. That's all we'll need. Bring your own outfit. I've plenty of grub here."

"That's mighty kind," said the sheriff. "The county will pay for your hoss and the grub."

"I don't want pay. This is my shout. I'm doing it for my friends."

"Well, your friends ought to be right obliged. I'll remember it. You won't find me makin' things harder. And now I'll pike along back to town."

They shook hands and the sheriff climbed back

into the sagging buckboard and departed. Casey returned to his quarters and began to gather an outfit by the only practical method; that is to say, by piling everything he wanted in a heap. He was engaged in this occupation when Clyde knocked and entered.

"Why, Casey, whatever are you doing?"

He told her, and she approved his plan. She began to examine the heap he had thrown together on the table — knife, cartridges, fishhooks and line, compass, matches, sweater, poncho — with a girl's interest in such masculine possessions. But she exclaimed at the lack of toilet articles. Where were his razors, his hairbrushes?

"I'll get along without them."

"My goodness, boy, you'll be scrubby. Aren't you going to take even a — a toothbrush?"

"Yes, I'll do that," he laughed. "There, that's enough for to-night. Feng will put up grub in the morning. What have you done with Kitty Wade and her husband? Hadn't we better look them up? They may be making love on the sly."

"Do you need a chaperon so badly?" She slipped her arm in his. "Come on, then. They've gone for a walk up the ditch. We'll meet them and come back together. Only I want to impress upon you, Casey, that they must walk ahead of us — unless it gets very dark, indeed."

"I think I get you," he laughed. "We'll arrange

that detail. Kitty Wade is a most sympathetic young matron."

They found the Wades, and their evening stroll became an inspection of the ranch. The effects of the rain were already visible in the colour of the grain. It was darker, more vigorous, sending forth new shoots. The grass lands, where the network of roots had retained the earlier moisture, were lush and knee deep. Soon it would be ready to cut.

The beauty of the evening held them out of doors. It was good to idle in the twilight with the scent of clover in the nostrils, to walk among the growing things. It was sweet to exchange confidences, to plan for the future as man and woman have from the beginning, painting it brightly, draping it in rose and gold, a perfect picture wherein all the colours harmonized.

It was the time of dreams. They gazed into the future as children might look across an unknown sea, seeing in fancy its stately galleons, its tall treasure ships, its white-winged pleasure craft, its wondrous, palm-fringed islands, where summer abode always; but they had no eyes for leaden skies and sullen shouldering swells spouting on hidden reefs, the great, gray bergs fog-hidden in the ship track, the drifting derelicts whose hopes were once as fair as their own. For God has mercifully arranged that these things shall be hidden from our eyes until the proper time.

Even when they reached the house they were not inclined to go indoors. They sat in the darkness, in pairs, apart, conversing in low tones, and so another hour slipped away. Back of them the house was dark; not a lamp was lighted. Only from Feng's kitchen a path of light streamed from the door. But as they were about to leave the veranda they heard the sound of hoofs approaching.

"Who on earth is coming at this time of night?" Wade asked.

"Sit quiet and we'll see," said Casey. His hand closed on the butt of a gun in his pocket, which he now carried constantly.

The hoofs slowed to a walk, and a shadowy horse and rider halted a few yards away. In the darkness of the veranda, with the deeper background of the building, they were invisible.

"Be th' mortal! but they've all gone to bed," muttered a disgusted voice. "An' what do yez know about that? 'Airly to bed an' airly to rise,' as the kids' dope books has it. Maybe ut makes a man healthy, but all the wealthy wise guys iver I knowed wint on th' well-known principle that home was the last place to close up. Faix, a man'll go home whin he's in no state f'r anny other place. Whoa! Howld still, there's a good harrse, till I see what's best to do. Don't be so onaisy. Whoa, darlin'! Bad cess to ye, ye roachbacked Prodestan' baste, kape off iv thim flower beds! Have yez no manners

at all, at all? Be all th' saints in glory I'll larrup th' head off iv yez — or I w'u'd if I wasn't afraid ye'd buck me onto the roof. Yez have me crippled intirely as ut is."

"Not a word, for your life!" Wade whispered. "That's a star monologue!"

Feng, attracted by the voice, came to the door.

"Hallo! What wanchee?" he demanded.

"The country's overrun wid them yelly divils!" Mr. Quilty muttered. "What wanchee? Th' nerve iv him! Ye weathered-ivory monkey face, I've business wid yer betters!"

"You keepee hossee off flowah bed," commanded Feng. "What foh you lidee him all oveh?"

"Ask th' harrse!" Quilty retorted. "The sight iv yez onsettles him, lowgrade baste as he is. Dom a Chinaman dead or alive, annyway!"

"You no good!" retorted Feng. "Me savvy you. You Ilishman, all same mick, all same flannel mout', all same bogtlotteh! You bum lailway man! You get dlunk, fo'get switch, thlain lun off tlack; you swingee lante'n, yellee 'All aboa'd!' you say, 'Jim Kli! what keepee Numbeh Eight?' You sellee ticket, knockee down change. No good, lailway man! Me savvy you, all light."

"Ye cross iv a limon peel and a case iv jandhers!" cried Mr. Quilty in wrath at these aspersions on an honourable calling, "I'm a notion to get down an' slug the head off iv yez! Faix, ut's no murder to kill

a Chinaman, but a bright jewel in me starry crown, ye long-nailed, rat-eatin', harrse-haired, pipe-hittin' slave iv th' black pill! I'll make yez think I'm a Hip Sing Tong or a runaway freight on th' big hill. I'll slaughter yez, mind, if I get off. Do yez know where yez will go whin yez die at my hands?"

"Me go to heaven," said Feng, with comfortable conviction.

"Th' —— ye say!" ejaculated Mr. Quilty, in shocked amazement. "I think I see ye there!"

"You no see me," said Feng. "No Ilish lailway man stop in heaven. Me catchee heaven all light. Missionally say so."

"Is ut mish-naries they send to waste time on the loikes iv yez?" snorted Mr. Quilty. "Hivin! Fine comp'ny ye'd be f'r the holy men and blessid saints an' martyrs an' pure, snow-white angels! Why, ye idolatrous, stick-burnin', kow-towin', joss-worshippin' pagan son iv a mat-sailed junk and a chopstick, they'd slam the pearly gates forninst yer face and stick their holy fingers to their blessid noses at yez. Hivin! Ye'll never smell ut, nor scuffle yer filthy shoes on th' goolden streets. Purgathry! Faix, yer ticket reads straight through, wid no stop-off priv'leges whatever. Th' cindher pit f'r yours! Be th' Rock iv Cashel, I'll l'arn yez to insult th' heav'nly throng!"

So saying, he dropped ungracefully from his horse and made a rush for Feng, who retreated, slammed

the screen door, and, from inside, threatened the storming party with a formidable butcher knife.

"Whurroo!" shouted Mr. Quilty, dancing on the steps. "Come out, ye yelly plague, knife and all, an' l'ave me knock the stuffin' out iv yez! Annyways, I'll tell ye what ye are. Ye're a ——"

But Casey, fearful of Mr. Quilty's descriptive powers, saw fit to interrupt.

"Hello! What's all the row? That you, Corney?"

"Yer owner has saved yer life," Mr. Quilty informed Feng. "Sure ut's me, Casey. I'm after l'arnin' this Oriental curse iv the wurruld how to talk to his betters." He mounted the steps, peering suspiciously at the occupants of the veranda. "Who's these?" he demanded. "I can't see in the dark. Miss Burnaby, is ut, an' Misther Wade an' his leddy? I believe yez were here all the time!"

"We just came in from the other side," Casey lied manfully.

"Yes, ye did! I can see yez laughin', and I don't blame yez. 'Twas funny how scared the Chink was. Well, ut does thim lower races good to be bawled out wanst in a while by their superiors."

Casey led the way indoors, and lighted the lamps. He established Mr. Quilty in a comfortable chair, with a cigar and a cold drink.

"Th' health and inclinations iv all here," said Mr. Quilty, waving his glass gracefully. "I'm glad

to see yez all lookin' so well, more partic'larly the leddies."

"Thank you, Mr. Quilty," said Clyde.

"It's very nice of you, Mr. Quilty," said Kitty Wade.

"It's not often I have the good forchune to be in leddies' society," Mr. Quilty continued. "Me tongue has lost th' right twist for compliments; but, sure, if ut hadn't ut wouldn't begin to do th' pair iv yez justice. Oh, divil th' bit iv soodher am I givin' yez. It's two pretty women yez are. Well, well, I'm an old felly who's had his day. Ye won't mind me. Annyways, wan iv yez has a man, an' th' other is spoken for, belike. Now whatever makes Casey, there, blush? I didn't think he knowed how. An' Miss Burnaby, too! What'll yez do whin they's rice lodged in yer clothes and yer hats, an' white ribbons on yer trunks, an' th' waiters grin whin ye go into the diner? Let me tell ye, now ——"

"Please, please, Mr. Quilty!" Clyde pleaded.

"Have I rung th' bell?" he demanded.

"Bull's-eye," said Wade. "Own up to it, you two. It's obvious."

"Oh, is it?" said Clyde. "Well, if we're half as bad as you and Kitty were ——"

"Don't mind him; he was in love with me once," said Kitty.

"He is yet," said Clyde.

"Faix, I don't wonder at ut," said Mr. Quilty gallantly.

"Very skilful shift of topic," said Wade. "I admit everything. I guess we were bad enough; but you and Casey are the limit."

"But look at th' fine excuse both iv thim has," said Mr. Quilty, beaming. "Here's long life an' happiness, an' may yer only troubles be — well, well, niver mind th' troubles. There's time enough to think iv them whin they come. Which puts me in mind that I do be forgettin' what *I* come for. Ut's about Tom. D'ye know where he's at?"

"Not exactly. Why?"

"Mebbe ye heard that th' water comp'ny is payin' off its men an' shuttin' down. Well, then, there's all iv thim hard-faced *tillikums* iv Cross, deceased, paid off; an' instid iv gittin' dhrunk like dacint Christians, what do they do but outfit thimselves an' start back fer th' hills, six iv thim — an' a divil iv a harrd bunch, savin' th' leddies' presence. Wan iv thim made a brag that they'd get Tom. So I come out to tell yez, in case ye had word from him. An' they's officers out afther that young divil iv a brother iv Miss Sheila's. Somebody ought to tell the boys to skin their eyes, if so be they're hangin' around."

CHAPTER XXX

CASEY and Sheriff Dove did not start the next afternoon. A telegram had detained the sheriff, and he did not reach Chakchak till night. He spent the evening with them, taking a great fancy to Clyde. He even blossomed out as a story teller, spinning yarns without embellishment and with great clearness. He told of cattle wars, of outlaws, of Indian fighters, of strange occurrences, of strange men, primitive of mind and of action, who had played their parts in the history of the West. It was information at first-hand, rare nowadays, and the listeners found the evening too short.

"Blanket time," said the sheriff, looking at his watch. "I ain't a young nighthawk no more. If we're to git a good start ——"

"We'd like to hear more, sheriff," said Clyde.

"Sho!" said Sheriff Dove, well pleased. "I could keep yarnin' half the night to a pretty girl. I ain't too old for that. Maybe when we get back we'll have another session."

Outside on the veranda she slipped her arm in his. "Take good care of Casey for me, sheriff, please."

"I sure will, little girl," he replied. "Don't you go to worryin', now. There's no call to. If it was easier travellin' you might come along, for all the trouble there'll be." He smiled down at her in fatherly fashion, his great, sinewy arm pressing hers, and the pressure reassured her.

"Thank you, sheriff. You — you're a *dear!*"

"Do I git a bid to the weddin'?"

"Of course you do." Clyde blushed and laughed. "Only I don't know just when it will be."

"Make it soon," he advised. "Life's short, little girl. Take all the happiness you can git. Good night."

They rode westward in the morning before the sun had risen, and camped that night in the foothills, having seen nobody. They entered the pass, and immediately came upon the trail of horses.

"Looks like there's been some travel," said the sheriff. "This here pass used much?"

"Not at this time of year. The Indians use it in the fall. They hunt across the range."

"These horses is shod," the sheriff remarked. "I sh'd say there's been half a dozen of 'em. Not less. Maybe more. I've knowed men that could tell exact."

"Not many of them left now."

"That's so. There ain't much need for trailin' these days. Too many telegraph wires."

They held to the pass, as did the hoofprints,

eventually dropping down into the valley of the Klimminchuck, where they camped for the night beside the ford, cooked supper, unrolled their blankets, and lay by the fire, smoking.

"This bunch of hosses," the sheriff observed, "seems to have split up here. Two or three of 'em crossed over, but the most went down the valley. What's down there?"

"Just valley. It's partly open and part heavy timber. There was a pack trail cut through once, but it's mostly grown up."

"Nobody lives down there?"

"Not a soul. Now and then somebody traps in winter."

"Um." The sheriff was thoughtful for some moments. "Does McHale know the country hereabouts?"

"Fairly well. Better than I do. And McCrae knows it better than he does."

"Um." The sheriff became silent again. "When a man goes to hidin' out," he observed after a long pause, "he 'most always hits for the country he knows. Seems like it's human nature. I'd do it myself, and so'd you. Seems like a man that's wanted is suspicious of strange ground. He don't know what's in it, and he's afraid of gettin' cornered. He don't know what he's goin' to run up against any mile. It's a mean feelin', that. It keeps a man on edge every minute. So he naturally makes

for the district he's at home in. It's a mistake, but they all make it. They figure they can dodge around where they know the trails and cut-offs. Consequently it's just a matter of time till they're caught. It's like an old buck that won't leave his range. Any man can git him that wants to spend a week at it."

"That's so," Casey agreed.

"So when I want a man and don't know where he's gone, I find out what place he thinks he knows best," the sheriff continued. "The system wins nine times out of ten. Now you say McHale's only out temporary. He's got a clear self-defence case, or thinks he has, and he's merely side-steppin' trouble. In that case he won't go as far as another man might. My *tumtum* is that he's somewheres down along this valley."

"Good reasoning," Casey admitted.

"The way to see a man down in a hole is to look over the edge," said the sheriff; "and the way to find a man in a valley is to get up on a hill. They ain't no such thing as a smokeless campfire invented yet, though, if a man rustles dry sticks and does his cookin' at noon of a bright day, he don't make much smoke. A feller fooled me once that way. He didn't take a chance on noon, but done his cookin' at night, down in a hole. Only way I got him, the fire burned in under a rock into some old roots, and sorter smudged along one mornin' when he was asleep."

Casey glanced up at the bulk of the ranges outlined in blackness against the sky. "If you say so, sheriff, we'll climb."

"I hate to," the sheriff admitted. "Couldn't you make a good guess?"

"No. I don't know any more than you do."

"Well," said the sheriff thoughtfully, "we'll try the valley first. We may come on some sign. It's bound to take time, anyway. There's a whole heap of country here if it was smoothed out and stretched level."

He knocked out his pipe and pulled his blanket around him, for down in that deep, watered valley the nights were cold. Casey followed his example. In two minutes both men were asleep, with the rush of the water and the crunch-crunch of the horses' teeth cropping the grasses in their ears.

They breakfasted in the dawn, saddled, and took a course downstream. The trail petered out; the hoof marks vanished. They rode with care through thick brush, and more easily in open, parklike glades. Grouse rose almost under their horses' hoofs, to sit bright-eyed on adjacent limbs, watching the travellers. Occasionally deer by twos and threes bounded springily away, white flags waving. Once the horses snorted and showed a disinclination to proceed, sniffing the air nervously.

"Bear," said Casey.

"Down among them berry bushes, I reckon," said the sheriff.

As he spoke, a black, furry head, short ears, and sharp muzzle rose above the tangled bushes. A narrow, red tongue licked out. Cunning little eyes regarded them with indignant suspicion.

"Woof!" said the bear. The sound was something between the snort of a hog and the first interrogative note of a watchdog, which hears a noise that requires explanation.

"Well, sport," said the sheriff, "berryin' good this mornin'?"

But at the sound of the human voice the black head disappeared beneath the surface of foliage. There was a momentary swaying of bushes in one spot, like the swirl of disturbed water after a fish; but there was nothing to mark the line of the beast's flight. For all his bulk he melted through the tangle as soundlessly as a spirit.

"Bears is learnin' manners nowadays," the sheriff commented. "Course, these here black ones never was much different from pigs. But take grizzlies. When I come West with my old people, a little shaver just able to set a pony, they was plumb sassy. I never did see such biggotty-actin' critters. Britch-loaders hadn't been in so durn long, and men didn't go huntin' grizzlies with the little old pea rifle just for fun. They was range bosses, and they

knowed it. Now it's only once in a while you'll find one that wants all the trail."

In the afternoon they came to an abandoned cabin, and dismounted to investigate. Casey shook his head at the filthy litter. "Nobody's been here," said he.

The sheriff peered narrowly about. "No?" he said. "Well, how about that?" He pointed to the ground. "Moccasin track, or part of one. Who wears moccasins?"

"McCrae does, most of the time."

"Then he's been here. He couldn't pass without lookin' in."

"Why not?"

"Because four men out of five can't go by an old shack without takin' a peep inside. I can't, myself. I judge you can't, either. Do you remember ever doin' it?"

"Why, no," Casey admitted, "now you speak of it, I don't. And I do remember rubbering into dozens of old wikiups one place and another."

"Sure," said the sheriff. "Human nature again. Anything that's made by a man and left behind will draw another man like molasses will a fly. I never knew a man yet that wouldn't nose around an old camping spot. Not that he expects to find anything, or wants to. He just can't help it. McCrae didn't stop here. Where did he go? We might as well look around a little."

In the process of looking around, they came on an abandoned camp. By the quantity of ashes a number of fires had been burned. There were the poles of a lean-to and a bough bed beneath it, and at a little distance were other beds of boughs. The ground was trampled, and the grass beaten down in the vicinity.

The sheriff nosed among the signs, lifting the boughs of the beds, trying the ashes with his finger for heat, making an examination of the ground, and wandering off in a circle around the camp, where horses had been picketed. Finally he came back to the fireplace, filled his pipe, and lay down. Casey, meanwhile, had been forming his own conclusions.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," said the sheriff, "I reckon you been usin' your eyes, too. Let's hear about it."

"It's your hunt."

"So it is. McCrae's met up with McHale. This here is their camp."

"How do you know?"

"You askin' because you don't know yourself, or because you want me to tell you?"

"I think you're right, but I'd like to know how you get at it."

"Well, I ain't no Old Sleuth nor Sherlock Holmes," said the sheriff, "but I've lived some years out of doors. I ain't workin' out no chain of reasonin';

I'm just usin' my eyes and a bit of savvy. This is how she works out:

"McHale and McCrae is both foot-loose, and both know this part of the country. They leave about the same time, and chances is they make for it. Then they meet. That's easy. Then we find the moccasin track. That fits McCrae. Next we find a lean-to with a two-man bough bed. There's the hollows where two men lay. That helps prove our first guess. It shows that some one was with McCrae, and the only other man hidin' out is McHale."

"But there are other bough beds. How do you know they weren't all made by one outfit?"

"There's only one lean-to."

"Two men may have been more particular than the others."

"The boughs of them other beds were cut later than this lean-to one."

"But the boughs are all green."

"The ends where they were cut are different. There's more gum on these than the others. That shows they were cut before. Then there's more needles broken off and sifted through to the ground beneath this bed. That shows it's been slept on more. Where would a man get his boughs? The nearest trees, of course. Well, there's more gum where the limbs were cut on the nearest trees than on them farther away. Then there's been a bunch

of horses staked out. Why didn't they bell 'em and let 'em range? Either because they didn't have no bells, or didn't want to use 'em. McHale and McCrae would keep their hosses on a rope so's they could make a quick get-away if they had to. They wouldn't take a chance on their strayin'. Now the grass that's been eaten down by the hosses is beginnin' to sprout again in some places, and not in others. Maybe that's because the pickets were shifted, but it's more likely that some hosses was here before the rest. That's about all. She works out all right, don't she?"

"Down to the hock card," Casey admitted. "I saw some of the signs, but not all. You filled in the gaps."

"It's a pity if I wouldn't savvy a few things about my own business," said the sheriff. "Some of it's guesswork, but the main features ain't. Now, when we go farther, we got to do straight guessin'. Who was this bunch that come in here where the two men was already camped? My guess is that it was this here Dade and his outfit. But they don't find the two here when they come, or there'd sure be sign of it. It looks to me like them two boys got to know that somebody was on their back trail, and moved camp sudden. But not so durn sudden they had to leave anything behind. Question is, where have they went to — the whole b'ilin' of 'em?"

"Down the valley. Otherwise we'd have seen some sign."

"I reckon that's so. If Dade works out things the way I have, he knows he's close on to McHale. Say he's got four or five men with him. He can comb the valley pretty clean. But here's another thing: How long will them two boys let themselves be chased?"

"Not very long. It's not safe to crowd either of them."

"If it was me," said the sheriff reflectively, "and a feud party was out on my trail, I'd be apt as not to bushwhack 'em some. You bet I wouldn't stand on ceremony with such hostiles. If I knowed the country I'd cache myself alongside some good open spot, wait till they got into the middle of it, and then slam loose. With two men that savvy their guns any one that got away would sure have a pull with Providence and be workin' it awful hard."

"Sandy would do that in a minute; but I think Tom doesn't want any more trouble if he can help it."

"He may get it shoved onto him. Well, seein' we're here, we may as well eat. Then we'll move on."

When their meal was over they followed the valley. Sunset found them at the edge of thick timber.

"How far does this run?" asked the sheriff.

"I don't know. I was never here before."

"Then we'll camp," said Dove, "and tackle her by daylight."

It was almost dark when Casey, sitting by the fire, suddenly held up his hand. "Somebody coming."

The sheriff listened for a moment. "Two horses," he announced. "May be Jack Pugh." Nevertheless, the old frontiersman shifted his position so that his gun lay ready to his hand.

A moment later two shadowy horsemen appeared, resolving themselves, as they approached, into Farwell and old Simon.

"Hello, the camp!" cried the former. "That you, Dunne?"

"Yes. What on earth are you doing here?"

"Same thing as yourself. This old Siwash missed you somehow. He found McHale and young McCrae, and, on the way out, he ran into Dade, Lewis, and the rest — six in all. When he got to the ranch you were gone, and nobody could tell him where. He came over to Talapus to tell them he'd seen Sandy. That's where I ran into him. And so, knowing that Sandy was with McHale, I got the old man to come back with me. I wanted to be in it if help was needed. We picked up your trail — or he did — and here we are."

"Well, it's blamed decent of you, Farwell," said Casey. "I didn't know that you and Sandy were such friends."

"We're not. The kid doesn't like me. I told you he pulled a gun on me once. All the same, it was up to me this time. I'm going to marry Sheila."

"The devil you are!" Casey exclaimed.

"You're blamed flattering," said Farwell. "You bet I'm going to marry her."

"You're getting one of the finest girls on earth."

"I know that as well as you do," said Farwell. "Then you see how it was up to me ——"

He broke off suddenly. Rolling softly along the hills, flung back and forth across the valley from rock wall to rock wall, repeated and magnified a hundred times, came an echo. So distant was it that the original sound itself was not heard; merely the reverberations of it struck the ear. But unmistakably it was made by a far-off gun. Before the echoes had died away others followed, until their resonance resembled continuous thunder.

"*Hiyu* shootum!" said Simon.

"You bet," the sheriff agreed. "I reckon the boys has got tired bein' moved on. Or else they been jumped sudden. That shootin's all of six miles off. Maybe more. It'll be plumb dark in no time. If there's no more shootin' it's settled by now. If there is it's a stand-off. Either way we have to wait till it gets light."

CHAPTER XXXI

I BEEN thinkin' we might as well move on a ways," said McHale. "Here's old Simon drops in on us. Somebody else might. I don't feel right about it. I want to git some place, like up in one o' them basins, where strangers won't be passin' by every day."

"Well, I'll go you," Sandy agreed; "but there's an old bear that I want first. He's got a foot as big as a fiddle; I'll bet he weighs as much as a steer."

"What'll you do with a bear? We don't want to go packin' a green hide about with us. The horses hate the smell of it."

"Let 'em get used to it, then," Sandy returned. "I'm starting after that bear now. Better come along. If I don't get him I'll go to-morrow."

But McHale refused to accompany him. He hated climbing. If he could go on a horse that would be different. Therefore Sandy set out alone.

He ascended a shoulder of the mountain, working his way upward to where he had located the range of the big bear. It was steady climbing, and rough as well, but Sandy was in hard, lean condition, with the limitless wind and springy muscles of youth.

He arrived at his objective point, a spot which gave him a clear view of the mountain side for a mile on either hand. Somewhere in that area, he had already decided, the bear would be feeding. He settled down for a long, careful inspection; first with the naked eye, which yielded nothing, and next with a pair of binoculars. Sandy, when hunting, possessed unlimited patience. He settled himself comfortably, and kept the glasses at work. Finally his patience was rewarded. A mile or more up the hillside a huge, brown shape shambled into view.

"Lord! he's a big brute," Sandy muttered. "That's a hide worth getting. I'll wait till he settles down for keeps."

Apparently the bear had found food to his liking. He was busy with paw and tongue beside a rotten log. Sandy mapped out a route in his mind, and decided to make a start. It was then noon. As he rose he happened to look up the valley.

It lay below him, ashimmer in the summer sun, a panorama of green, light and dark of shade, with the silver ribbon of the Klimminchuck appearing and disappearing down its length. It was, perhaps, as beautiful a mountain valley scene as eye ever beheld; but Sandy McCrae would not have looked at it twice save for a thin, gray thread which appeared above the treetops some miles away. It became a column, ballooned, and then was invisible. But he knew that somebody had just started a fire.

He picked out the spot with the glasses. Smoke was plainly visible through the powerful lenses. It was close to the river — beside the bank, in fact — and he could catch glimpses of one or two horses. But, because of the trees, he could see little more.

"Darn the luck," said Sandy. "There's the biggest hide in the whole range waiting for me, and somebody has to come butting in. Well, there's only one thing to do."

That thing being to get back to camp as fast as possible, Sandy proceeded to do it. He went downhill at a pace that would have shaken an older and heavier man to pieces; for going downhill is, contrary to the popular idea, much harder on the human frame than going up. He broke into camp and roused McHale from a state of somnolence and tobacco.

"I could 'a' tanned your young hide when you bulled off after that bear," said the latter. "Now I seem to see what them salvation scouts calls 'the finger of Providence' in the play. In other words, it's plumb safe to keep one eye skinned. Do I look like I was scared, Sandy?"

"Nah!" said Sandy contemptuously.

"Well, you're going to see me act like I was." He rose swiftly, his laziness falling from him now that there was work to do. "Go and fetch in them cayuses. I'll break camp."

The horses being on picket caused no delay.

When Sandy brought them in, McHale had their entire outfit in two heaps, ready to pack. With the skill and swiftness of experience they made the packs, threw the hitches, drew the lash ropes tight. The result was two compact bundles which could not work loose.

"I dunno who our friends are," said McHale, as they rode out of camp, "but if it's this here Dade bunch, say, what a surprise they'd have give me all by myself. I can just see me gettin' up in time to fall down."

"They've got no license to chase us all over," said Sandy. "We don't have to stand for it, do we? How'd it be if we held up their camp? Or else we could lay for them as they came along, and settle it right there."

"Bushwhack 'em?" said McHale. "No, I reckon not. We want to keep out of trouble. If we held 'em up what'd we do with them? We couldn't tie 'em and leave 'em; and we couldn't pack 'em around. Nothing for it but to run like men. The country's big enough for both of us.'

Sandy grunted disapproval, but said no more. Personally he would have welcomed a fight. He was a marvellously quick and accurate shot with either rifle or revolver, and he was ready to make a friend's quarrel his own. However, he deferred to McHale's views.

Farther down the Klimminchuck they turned up

a nameless tributary creek, following its course with difficulty, for the way was choked with down timber and slides, until they reached a beautiful little basin high up above the valley. There the creek had its source or sources; for the drainings of the basin were collected in a little lake lying beneath bare cliffs. The water was swarming with trout, so that one supply of food was assured.

Beside the lake and the cliffs they made camp. They could not see the valley, neither could they be seen thence; but by walking half a mile they could look down into it. Sandy, mindful of his disappointment, began to prospect for bear.

McHale relapsed once more into a morass of sleep and tobacco. But while Sandy was ranging afield he lay on the edge of the basin drowsing and watching the valley, for he did not intend to be taken by surprise.

But that was exactly what happened. He had withdrawn from his post of observation earlier than usual, and he and Sandy were smoking after supper in the fading light, when a little cavalcade rode into the basin, preceded by one who walked slowly, studying the ground.

McHale saw them at the same moment that they perceived the camp. He leaped to his feet with an oath, snatching up his rifle and a gunny sack, which, among other things, contained their cartridges. His belt gun he never laid aside.

Sandy also jumped for his gun, slamming the lever down and up as the weapon came to his shoulder. He stood fairly in the open, covering the foremost man. But McHale caught his arm.

"Come on and get back among them rocks," he cried. "We can't stand 'em off here."

Behind them as they ran a sudden yell went up, and a single bullet buzzed past like a mad bee. But they reached the shelter of the rocks fallen from the cliff at some remote period, and dropped to cover. Before them the great slabs formed a natural breastwork; behind them rose the sheer cliff, gray and weather-stained. Their backs were amply protected; in front they must take care of themselves.

The newcomers dismounted in the concealment of trees. Five minutes afterward a man walked leisurely forward. McHale recognized Dade. At fifty paces he halted him.

"I wouldn't come no nearer, Dade, if I was you."

"I'm coming a heap closer pretty soon."

"All right; you're expected," McHale retorted. "You call a feud on me, do you? Now you listen here: You call it off and call your bunch off, or there'll be doin's."

"I'm talkin' to your partner," said Dade. "I s'pose it's young McCrae. We got nothing against you, McCrae. You come out o' there, take your

horse and your dunnage, and git. Nobody'll hurt you."

"Is that so?" sneered Sandy. "Go plumb to blazes, will you?"

"I'll think about it," said Dade coolly.

"You'll do more than think about it if you crowd in here," Sandy retorted.

"Nobody wants to crowd you," said Dade. "We're after McHale, and we're goin' to get him. Don't you mix up in it. If you do you may get hurt."

"That ain't such bad advice, kid," interrupted McHale. "I'm able for 'em, I reckon. Better pull your freight like he tells you. This ain't your show, nohow, and you've got your folks to think of."

"Do you think I'm a yellow dog, or what?" Sandy snapped back, glaring at him. "Quit? I think I see myself. I'll smash this Dade's belt buckle right now." He lifted his rifle.

"Hold on," said McHale. "This kid is some obstinate," he called to Dade. "His *tumtum* is that he'll stick. *I* don't want him in it."

"He's got his chance," said Dade. "It's up to him."

Young McCrae launched a string of epithets at him, the cream of the vocabularies of certain mule skinners of his acquaintance. Meanwhile his finger itched on the trigger.

"You're a durn poor persuader," said McHale.

"The kid will stick. Far's I'm concerned, if you want me, come and get me. Don't show your hide no more. I'm surely done talkin' to you."

Dade turned and walked away. Sandy covered him.

"Not in the back," said McHale.

Immediately afterward a thirty-thirty struck a rock in front of them, glancing off at an angle, wailing away into the distance. Sandy McCrae, lying at full length peering along the slim barrel of his weapon, pressed the trigger and swore in disappointment.

"Centred a stump," he said. "There it is yet. It looked like somebody."

All was quiet for five minutes. Then a sleet of lead pelted their position, patting against the cliff behind them, and splashing upon the rocks in front. Splinters and particles of stone, lead, and nickel flew everywhere.

"Git down low," McHale advised, hugging a bowlder.

"I am down," said Sandy.

"Then dig a hole." McHale laughed, and then swore as a sharp fragment of rock ripped his cheek.

"Hit you?"

"Nope. Rock sliver. I'll bet their guns is gettin' hot. This won't last."

The fusillade ceased. McHale shoved his rifle barrel through a crevice.

"Maybe some gent will stick out his head to see

how many corpses there is of us. This light's gettin' durn bad. I wish I had an ivory foresight, 'stead o' this gold bead. I can't see ——"

His rifle muzzle leaped in recoil as he spoke. Two hundred yards away a man making a rush forward for a closer position winced and half halted. Instantly Sandy's rifle lanced the dimming light with a twelve-foot shaft of flame. The man straightened, staggered, and threw both arms upward as if to shield his face. Sandy fired again as the lever clashed back into place. The man fell forward.

"Got him!" cried Sandy exultantly. "Centred him twice, Tom!"

"I reckon you did. That's one out of it." He fired again without result. Sandy shot three times rapidly, and swore at the light.

"You're overshootin'," said McHale. "You can't draw the foresight fine enough in this light. Hold lower."

"Nothing to hold on," grumbled McCrae. "They're cached close. If one of them would only come out to fetch in that dead one I wouldn't do a thing to him."

McHale eyed him speculatively. "Seems like your young soul ain't swamped by no wave of remorse at killin' a man. Don't make you feel shaky nor nothin'?"

Young McCrae smiled grimly. "Not that I can

notice. All that lead they slung at us scared remorse clean out of my system. I'm lookin' for a chance to repeat."

But darkness settled down without that chance, making accurate shooting impossible. Objects at fifty yards became indistinct. Only the smoky-red reflection of the sunset remained.

"Think they've got enough?" asked Sandy.

"Why, they ain't got started yet. Lucky we had our supper. We can stand quite a racket on a full stomach. Might as well smoke, I reckon."

Sandy shivered slightly as the chill of the mountain night air struck through his thin clothing. "Wish I'd grabbed a blanket or a coat."

"It'll be a heap worse before mornin'," said McHale.

"You're a cheerful devil!"

"Think of how good the sun'll feel. Maybe something will happen to warm us up before then."

A forty-pound stone suddenly crashed down to one side of them, smashing in the rocks and bushes with terrific impact. Sandy leaped to his feet, his revolver streaming continuous fire at the top of the cliff.

"Git down, you durn fool!" cried McHale.

Sandy dropped just in time. A volley came from in front, and a leaden storm howled overhead.

"Talk about luck!" said McHale. "Don't you take a chance like that again." He rolled over on

his back and put his rifle to his shoulder. "If I could only git that cuss up there against the sky line ——"

But the top of the cliff was fringed with bushes. Another stone bounded down, struck a projection, leaped out, and hit ten feet in front of them. McHale fired by guess; but, like most guesswork shooting, without result. Another stone struck in front. He moved in closer to the cliff and chuckled grimly.

"We're right under a ledge. Them rocks all bounced off it. Mighty lucky for us. You feelin' any warmer now?"

"You bet. Summer done come again. I wish I could see to shoot." He fired at the flash of a gun, and winced suddenly.

"Burned me that time!"

A glancing bullet had ripped the flesh of his left side along the ribs. McHale made a bandage of the handkerchief he wore around his neck.

"You'll sure have a sore side, kid. Keep down tight. Don't take no more chances." But a moment afterward he grunted and his rifle clattered against the rocks.

"What is it?"

"My right arm. Busted above the elbow." He breathed deeply with the first pain throbs following the shock, and gritted his teeth. "Ain't this hell? I'm out of it for rifle shootin'. Here, come and cut

off my shirt sleeve and tie her up some. See how much blood she's pumpin'! Take a turn above the hole and twist her up tight. Blamed if I want to bleed to death. I got a lot of things to see to first."

Sandy examined the wound by the feeble light of matches, which McHale held in his left hand, and declared that the arteries were uninjured. He cut off a leg of his trousers below the knee, and, with McHale's shirt sleeve, organized a bandage, binding it with the thongs of his moccasins, swearing steadily below his breath.

McHale leaned back against the rock and demanded his pipe. Sandy filled it, and held a match to the load. McHale puffed great smoke clouds into the darkness.

"Tobacco's sure a fine anæsthetic. She beats chloroform and tooth jerkers' gas. And now, kid, you git!"

"Do what?"

"Make a get-away. Hike. Leak out o' this. You can do it in the dark just as easy as a weasel."

"Say," said Sandy, "you didn't get hit alongside the head, too, did you?"

"Not yet. This is straight goods. I mean it. There's no use you stickin'. There's too many accidents happenin'. Come mornin' maybe you don't git a chance."

"Come mornin'," Sandy replied, "when I can see my sights, I'll clean the whole bunch out."

"Other people can see sights then. Kid, they got me rounded up. I ain't no good except on a horse. If I could make a get-away I would. But I can't. You can. There's no sense in both of us bein' wiped out. Also, there's your folks. I ain't got any. And, then, I've lived longer than you, and I've had a heap more fun. I'm plumb satisfied with the deal. If I quit the game now I break better'n even. Shake hands and git out o' here while you can."

"Forget it!" snapped Sandy. "Would *you* quit *me?* Not any. D'ye think I could look Casey in the face, or Sheila, or my old dad? Would one of *them* quit *you?* You bet they wouldn't. I'll see this through. Here, gimme what rifle cartridges you got, and shut up that line of talk. I won't stand for it, and I won't go."

"'Most every family has one blame fool in it," said McHale. "All right, durn you, stay. If I could chase you out I'd do it. Reach down and pull my belt gun for me. I can shoot left-handed some."

They passed the night miserably, waiting for an attack which did not come. The pain of their wounds was added to the discomfort of the cold. Dawn found them shivering, numbed, weary-eyed, staring through the lifting gloom, their weapons ready. As the light grew they could see their own camp, but no one occupied it. Farther off a column of smoke rose.

"Cookin' breakfast down in a hole," said McHale. "Playin' it plumb safe. They ain't takin' a chance on your shootin'."

"They'd better not," said Sandy. His young face showed grimed and pinched in the growing light, but his eyes were hard and clear. "Do you s'pose I could sneak over and get a stand on them?"

"I wouldn't try. You bet somebody's keeping cases on these rocks."

Half an hour passed, an hour. The sun struck the basin, mottling its green with gold, striking their chilled bodies with grateful warmth.

"Say," asked Sandy, "don't you want a drink of water?"

"Quit foolin'," McHale replied. "I been thinkin' of it for hours. I could drink that there lake dry."

Still nothing happened. The waiting began to get on their nerves.

"What d'you s'pose they're framing up?" Sandy asked.

"Don't know. Durn it! I can't do nothin' unless they run in on us," McHale grumbled. "Wisht I could hold a rifle."

"Let 'em try to run in," said Sandy grimly. He had McHale's rifle in addition to his own. "They've got to come two hundred yards without cover. I'll stop every blamed one of them in one hundred."

Suddenly he lifted his rifle, hesitated, and lay

with his cheek to the stock, staring along the sights.

"See somethin'?" McHale asked.

"Over there past those jack pines. Man on a horse. He'll come out again."

Far off among the trees they saw not one mounted man, but several. They could catch glimpses merely. The horsemen appeared to be making for the valley, but not by the way in which they had come.

"By thunder!" cried McHale, "it looks like they're pullin' out."

His further remarks were lost in a rolling fire as Sandy unhooked his entire magazine at the retreating figures. He caught up McHale's rifle and emptied that, too.

"Save some ca'tridges for seed," advised McHale. "What's the use of snapshootin' at that range? You can't hit nothin'."

"You never know what luck you'll have," said Sandy. "I couldn't draw a sight with them moving in the brush. How many did you count?"

"Five — near as I could make it."

"Say, how'd it be if I went after them?"

"It'd be one durn young fool the less," McHale replied. "You want to know when you're well off. Don't stand up yet. There may be some play to this that we don't savvy."

"Rats! They've got a bellyful, I tell you. Five's the bunch, ain't it? — all but that one we got.

I ain't going to stay cached here all day. I want some grub."

But McHale persuaded him to wait ten mintues. Then, after exposing a hat and a rolled-up coat as decoys without the least result, they emerged from their fortress.

"Didn't rustle our hosses," said McHale. "That's luck. I wonder what they done with that feller you downed. Let's look at their camp."

Down in the hollow where the besiegers had built their fire they found what they sought. It lay covered by a blanket. Sandy stripped the covering away.

"Dade, by thunder!" he exclaimed. McHale looked down thoughtfully at the dead man.

"I'm sure glad it was him," he observed. "I reckon that settles this feud business. That's why them fellers pulled out. It was his war, and when he got downed they didn't see no sense carryin' it on."

"Well, they might have buried him, anyway," Sandy grumbled.

"Maybe they figured you'd want to peel off his scalp," said McHale, with mild sarcasm. "I'm sure willing to take a little trouble like buryin' Dade."

"So'm I," Sandy admitted, replacing the blanket. "I guess we're pretty lucky. Come on while I rustle some grub. We want to pull out of here.

You've got to get to a doctor as soon as you can."

They were eating breakfast when Casey, Farwell, the sheriff, and Simon rode into the basin, causing Sandy to snatch up his rifle under the impression that their assailants were returning. The four had made the best time they could, but had been at a loss to know the exact point until Sandy's farewell fusillade.

"You sure missed a heap of fun, Casey, "said McHale.

"Well, some of it didn't miss you," said Casey. "I'm blame sorry about that arm, Tom. It'll be a tough ride for you."

"I'm able for it, I reckon. I wish you'd run into them fellers."

"Never saw hair nor hide of them. Just as well, maybe. Now, Tom, this is Sheriff Dove. He wants you, and I think he wants Sandy. I told him that you both had too much sense to make things hard for him."

"Far's I'm concerned I'm his meat," said McHale. "I'd have to come in, anyway, now. Sandy was a durn fool ever to hide out. I shouldn't have let him. Lucky for me I did, though."

"That's sense," said the sheriff. "You boys will find I'm all right to get on with. I haven't heard you say anything, McCrae?"

"I guess I don't need to say anything," said

Sandy. "Casey came along with you, didn't he? That's good enough for me."

"I'm right obliged to him, too," said Dove. "He's sure saved me a lot of trouble. Lemme see that arm of yours, McHale. I savvy a little about them things. Anyway, I'll fix up some splints for it till you can get hold of a regular medicine man."

CHAPTER XXXII

"AND so you're going to marry this Casey Dunne," said old Jim Hess. He and Clyde sat on the veranda at Chakchak, and they had been discussing the ranch, its owner, and the events that had led up to his absence.

"Yes, Uncle Jim, I'm going to marry him."

"Well," said the big railway man, "making allowance for your natural partiality, his stock seems to be worth about par. I'll know better when I've had a look at him. I tell you one thing, I'm glad he isn't a foreigner. I never liked those fellows who tagged about after you. This country can produce as good men as you'll find. The others weren't my sort. All right in their way, perhaps, but they seemed to go too much on family and ancestry. That's good enough, too, but it seems to me that the ancestors of some of them must have been a blamed sight better men than they were. After all, a girl doesn't marry the ancestor. Dunne seems to have hoed his own row. That's what I did. I'm prepared to like him. Only I don't want you to make any mistake."

"There's no mistake, Uncle Jim," she said,

patting his big hand. "Casey's a *man.* You *will* like him. Look away out there where the dust is rising! Aren't those men on horseback? Yes, they are. It must be Casey coming home." Her pleasure was apparent in her voice.

The dust cloud resolved itself into four mounted men and three pack animals. They moved slowly, at a walk almost, the dust puffing up from the hoofs drifting over and enveloping them.

"Which is your Casey Dunne?" asked Hess.

Clyde stared with troubled eyes.

"I — I don't see him. There's Tom McHale, and the sheriff, and Sandy McCrae, and the old Indian. Why, Tom McHale has been hurt. His arm is in a sling. How slowly they ride! It's — it's like a funeral. Surely nothing can have happened. Oh, surely ——" She caught her breath sharply, her eyes dilating. "Look!" she cried. "The last pack horse!"

The load on the last horse was a shapeless thing, not compact and built up like a pack, but hanging low on either side, shrouded by a canvas. From under this cover a hand and arm dangled, swinging to and fro with each motion of the animal.

Clyde felt a great fear, cold as the clutch of a dead hand itself, close on her heart, driving the young blood from her cheeks. "It can't be!" she said to herself. "Oh — it *can't* be."

Hess swore beneath his breath. If it were Casey

Dunne lying across that pack horse —— He put a huge protective arm around Clyde's shoulders, as if to shield her from the evil they both feared.

But she slipped from beneath his arm and fled down the steps toward the party who would have passed in the direction of the stables without halting. The sheriff, seeing her, pulled up. She caught McHale's hardened paw in both her hands, searching his eyes for the truth. But McHale's face, though weary and lined with pain, and, moreover, rendered decidedly unprepossessing by a growth of stubble, contained no signs of disaster.

"Where's Casey, Tom?"

"Casey?" McHale replied. "Why, he hiked on ahead to git a medicine man to fix up this arm of mine. Arm's done busted. He ought to be here most any time now."

To Clyde it was as if the sun had shot through a lowering, ominous cloud. She was faint with the joy of relief. "Thank God! Thank God!" she murmured.

"You seem to be upset about something, ma'am," said the sheriff gently. "Has anything went wrong?"

Hess answered for her. "What have you got on that last pack horse, sheriff?"

Jim Dove looked around and muttered an oath. "If that ain't plumb careless of me! I thought I had him all covered up. Rope must have slipped.

That's Jake Betts, holdup and bad man, that's been callin' himself Dade around here. There's five hundred reward for him, and to collect the money I had to pack him in. I sure didn't allow to scare any women by lettin' an arm hang loose. And the little lady thought it was Dunne? Dunne's all safe and rugged. We thought he'd be here ahead of us."

Hess followed the sheriff to the stable and introduced himself, going directly to the point, as was his custom.

"Sheriff," he said, "I've just come, and naturally I don't know all that has happened, but there are two or three things I want you to know. In the first place, my niece, Miss Burnaby, is going to marry this man Dunne. And, in the second place, I'm now running this irrigation company and the railway that owns it, and so far as any prosecutions are concerned I won't have anything to do with them. Does that make any difference to you?"

"Some," said the sheriff. "It lets young McCrae out, I reckon."

"How about McHale?"

"That's a killin'. You got nothin' to do with that. Anyway, he's got a good defence."

"I'll sign his bail bond to any amount."

"I reckon there won't be no trouble about that," said the sheriff. "I know a man when I see him.

McHale's all right. You won't find me makin' things hard for anybody around here, Mr. Hess."

In half an hour Casey rode up, bringing with him a man of medicine in the person of Doctor Billy Swift. And Billy Swift, whose chronic grievance was that Coldstream was altogether too healthy for a physician to live in, greeted his patients with enthusiasm and got busy at once.

Hess, strolling up from a confidential talk with Sheriff Dove, ran into Clyde and Casey snugly ensconced in a corner of the veranda, where thick hop vines shaded them from the public gaze.

"Excuse *me!*" said Hess, with little originality, but much embarrassment.

"Not at all," Casey replied, under the impression that he was carrying off matters very nonchalantly. Clyde laughed at both of them.

"We don't mind you, Uncle Jim, do we, Casey?"

"Look here," said Hess, "if this is the young man who has been raisin' Cain around here, and destroying my property before I owned it. suppose you introduce me?"

The two men shook hands, gripping hard, measuring each other with their eyes. And Clyde was tactful enough to leave them to develop their acquaintance alone.

"I want to thank you for your wire to Clyde," said Casey. "You can guess what it meant to all of us here."

"I've a fair notion," said Hess. "Of course, I only know what Clyde has told me, but I can see that you people have been up against a hard proposition. After this I hope you won't have much to kick at. We won't take advantage of that clause in the old railway charter — at least not enough to interfere with men who are actually using water now. But I want you to be satisfied with enough to irrigate, used economically."

"That's all we ever wanted."

"I'm glad to hear it. Now I've fixed up this matter of young McCrae's. That's settled. No more trouble about it. As to your man, McHale, I'm told that his trial will be a mere matter of form. Wade will look after that. Now, about Clyde."

"Yes," said Casey.

"She's her own mistress — you understand that. You have a good property here — not as much money as she has, but enough to get along on if she hadn't anything. That's all right. I suppose her money's no drawback, eh? Don't look mad about it, young man. You're fond of her, of course. I understand you made what you've got yourself?"

"Every cent. I've been out for myself since I was about fifteen. This is what I've got to show for it."

"And it's a good little stake," said Hess heartily. "I made my own pile, too. That's what I like. Now, I'm going to ask you a personal question:

What sort of life have you behind you? You understand me. There must be no comeback where Clyde is concerned. I want a straight answer."

"You'll get it. I've always been too busy to be foolish. My habits are about average — possibly better than average. I'm absolutely healthy. I've not had a day's sickness — bar accidents — since I grew up. There's absolutely no reason why I shouldn't marry Clyde."

"That's the boy!" said old Jim Hess, with satisfaction, gripping his hand again. "Your stock's par with me, remember, and I want you to consider me your friend, even if I am to be a relation by marriage."

Shortly afterward Sheila and Farwell arrived on hard-ridden horses.

"She hustled me right over here," said the latter. "Didn't even give me time to shave. I told her McHale and Sandy were all right, but she had to come to see for herself."

"Seeing that Sandy has eaten six fried eggs with bacon and bread buns to match, I imagine he may be regarded as convalescent," laughed Casey. "Tom has the tobacco trust half broken already."

Sandy McCrae squirmed uneasily in his sister's embrace, finding it embarrassing.

"That's plenty, that's plenty!" he growled. "You'd think I was a sole survivor or something. Say, what are you trying to do — choke me? There,

you've kissed me three times already. Ouch! Darn it, don't hug me. My side's sore. Try that hold on Farwell. He looks as if he wouldn't mind."

Casey laughed. Sheila and Farwell reddened. A smothered chuckle from McHale showed that he was enjoying himself. He grinned over Sandy's shoulder.

"Howdy, Miss Sheila? Brothers don't know their own luck. Wisht I had a sister about your size."

"I'll adopt you right now!" she declared, and proceeded to give practical proof of it, somewhat to his confusion.

"You're an awful bluff, Tom," she accused him. "Really, I believe you're bashful with girls. I never suspected it before."

"It's just want of practice," grinned McHale. "Some day when I have time I'm going out to get me a girl like you. There was one down at ——"

But Clyde's appearance interrupted McHale's reminiscences. She and Sheila, arms about each other, strolled away to exchange confidences. Casey and Farwell followed.

"We ain't in it," said McHale.

"Well, who wants to be?" said Sandy.

"A few weeks ago," McHale mused, "them two girls warmed up to each other about as much as two wet sticks of wood; and them two sports would

have locked horns at the bat of an eye. Look at 'em now! What done it?"

"Does your arm hurt you much?" Sandy asked.

"Sortin' out the hand done it," McHale continued, unheeding. "Each girl finds out that the other ain't organizin' to be hostile. And the men find out that they're playin' different systems; likewise, that each has a good point or two."

"She sure must have been a hard trip for you down from the hills," Sandy commented, with much sarcasm.

"Love," said McHale sentimentally, "is a durn funny thing."

Sandy's disgusted comment consisted of but one word not usually associated with the tender passion. "Well, may be — sometimes," McHale admitted.

It was a merry party that sat down to the best supper Feng could prepare on short notice. Wade was in great form. He outdid himself, keeping up a rapid fire of jokes and conversation. The sheriff, infected by his example, uncovered a vein of unsuspected humour. McHale, who referred to himself as "a temp'rary southpaw," contributed his quota. Sandy was silent and dour, as usual. Jim Hess said little, but he beamed on everybody, enjoying their happiness.

When Sheila insisted that she must go, Casey saddled Dolly for Clyde and Shiner for himself. He rode with Sheila, temporarily relinquishing Clyde

to Farwell. A couple of hundred yards behind the others, just free of their dust, they jogged easily side by side.

"Our rides together are about over, Casey," she said, with a little sigh.

"How is that?"

"You know as well as I do. The blessed proprieties are butting in here nowadays; and, besides, we both belong to other people. Dick wants to be married soon. Of course, I'll have to go where he goes. Thank goodness, he hasn't got any people to be my people, and to pass judgment on me."

"I'll be sorry to lose you, Sheila; and I think you'll be sorry to go."

"Yes. I'll miss the rolling country, and the hills to the west, and the long days outdoors. Oh, heavens, how I'll miss them! And yet it's worth while, Casey!"

"I'm awfully glad, for your sake, that you think so much of him, old girl. He's a fine chap — when you get to know him. But I'll miss you. How long is it since we had our first ride together?"

"Seven years — no, eight. I was riding a bad pinto. Dad traded him afterward. You wouldn't let me go home alone. Remember?"

"Of course. Awful brute for a girl to ride!"

"He never set me afoot," she said proudly. "But you'll be leaving here, too, Casey."

"I don't think so."

"Oh, yes, you will. Clyde's money ——"

"Hang her money! Don't throw that up to me."

"Nonsense! Don't be so touchy. I wish *I* had it. You'll go where there are people and things happening. You'll keep the ranch, but Tom will look after it."

"No, no."

"Yes, yes. You won't be idle — you're not that kind — but you'll find other interests, and the money may be a stepping-stone. She's a dear girl, Casey. Be good to her."

"I couldn't be anything else. You needn't tell me I'm not worthy of her; I know it."

"You're worthy of any girl," she said firmly. "Not a bit of hot air, either, old boy. I almost fell in love with you myself."

"By George!" he exclaimed, "there were times when I wondered how much I thought of you."

She laughed, well pleased. "We know the difference now, don't we? What a mistake it would have been! I'm glad we kept these thoughts to ourselves — glad we never played at being in love. Now we can talk without fear of misunderstanding. Somehow, now, the years here seem like a dream to me. Yes, I know they've been busy years, crowded with work for both of us; but just now they don't seem real. We seem — I seem — to be standing at the boundary of a new life. All that

is over was just preparation for it — the long days in the sun and the wind, the quiet nights beneath the stars, the big, lonely, brown land, and the hazy blue of the hills. The girl that lived among them seems like a little, dead sister. And yet I love these things. Wherever I go, whatever happens to me, I shall think of them always."

"That's absolutely true. They are in your heart — a part of you. I understand. The little boy that lay on a lake shore years ago and watched the old stone hookers wallowing through the long swells doesn't seem to be Casey Dunne. And yet I can smell the wet sand and the clean lake breezes now. These are the things that keep our hearts young. You were born in the West, Sheila, and I in the East; but the roots of our beings fed on the clean things of the earth that mothered us some thousands of miles apart, and the taste will never be forgotten. In the years to come we will think of the years here as to-night we think of our childhood."

She held out her hand. Gauntlet met gauntlet in the hard grip of comradeship.

"Good-bye, Casey. It's not likely we'll ever talk of these things again. I'm glad you've been a part of my life."

"Good luck to you always, Sheila."

"They've left us behind," she said. "Come on! One last good run, Casey!"

Clyde and Farwell, riding decorously at an easy

jog trot, heard the thunder of hoofs behind them, and turned to see the bay and the buckskin sweep past, encouraged by voice and heel.

"She'll kill herself some day," Farwell ejaculated, and he scolded her roundly when they rode up to where she and Casey had finally halted their blown steeds.

"Listen to him!" cried Sheila, in derision. "As if I didn't savvy a horse! All right, my lord, I won't do it again till next time. And now, Casey, you and Clyde must not come any farther. It will be dark before you get back."

"If you want to be rid of us ——" he suggested.

"You've been sorry for yourself for the last hour, and you needn't deny it," she retorted.

Clyde and Casey rode slowly homeward through the falling dusk. For the first time since his return they were really alone together. She made him tell her all that had occurred, down to the minutest detail.

"But now there will be no more trouble of any kind," she predicted.

"Thanks to you."

"Thanks to Uncle Jim."

"Both of you. He's a big man — a nation builder — but if his niece hadn't had the good taste to fall in love with me his interest would have been less personal. He wouldn't have got around

to a little matter like this for months. Anyway, we bracket you together. Do you know that some of the kids are being taught to pray for you?"

"Not really?"

"Fact. Doctor Swift told me. 'God bless pa, and ma, and Mister Jim Hess, and Miss Burnaby.' That's the formula. Swift predicts that the next batch of christenings will include a 'Yim Hess' Swanson and a 'Clyde Burnaby' Brulé. Such is fame! Think you can stand the dizzy popularity?"

"Lovely!" cried Clyde. "I'll order silver mugs to-morrow, and start a savings account for each baby."

"Go slow!" he laughed. "You'll have 'em all named after you at that rate."

"I'll get the mugs and a spoon, anyway. I never was so flattered before. I've just begun to *live* since I came out here. Why, Casey, my life was absolutely empty. You can't imagine how lonely and bored I was."

"What a shame! We'll see that it doesn't occur again. Which opens an interesting question: When are you going to marry me?"

"Why — I hadn't thought. I suppose we should think of it."

"Well, it's usual, under the circumstances."

"Next June? I think I should like to be a June bride."

"See here, young lady," said Casey severely,

"what sort of a gold brick is this? Are you aware that we are in the fag end of July?"

"It's really not a long engagement. A year soon passes."

"And the years soon pass. I'm not going to be defrauded of a year's happiness. I'll stand for any time in September, but not a day later."

"September! But, my dearest boy, that's only a few weeks."

"That's why I said September."

She laughed happily. "Very well, September. But I'll have a thousand things to do. I'll have to go back with Uncle Jim."

"What's the use? Stay here. Kitty Wade will stay, too. I'll coax her."

"But I've all sorts of things to buy?"

"Order 'em by mail."

"My trousseau *by mail!*" she exclaimed, in horror. "It would be sacrilege."

"Oh, well, suit yourself," said Casey, with a sigh of resignation. "Thank the Lord it only happens once."

She laughed. "And then there's our honeymoon to plan. Where shall we spend it?"

"It's up to you. Wherever you say."

"You've never been to Europe?"

"No. But I'd rather do my honeymooning where I can ask for what I want with some chance of getting it."

"But I speak French, German, and Italian — not fluently, but well enough to get along on."

"And I talk United States, Chinook, and some Cree — we ought to get along almost anywhere," he laughed. "Let's leave this Europe business open. Now here's a really serious question: When our honeymoon is over — what?"

"I don't understand."

"Where shall we live? I can sell out here, if you like."

"But you wouldn't like?"

"I'd hate to," he admitted.

"I know. So should I. We'll live here, at Chakchak. It shall be our home."

"Would you be contented? It's lonely at times. The winters are long. You'd miss your friends and your old life."

"I ran away from both. I love your country because it's yours. It shall be mine, too. Look!" Away in the distance a tiny point of light twinkled. "There are the lights of Chakchak — our home lights, dear!"

Her hand sought his in the darkness, met, and clasped it. A star shot in a blazing trail across the velvet blackness of the sky. The first breath of the night breeze, cold from the mountain passes, brushed their cheeks. Save for the distant light the world was dark, the land lonely, silent, devoid of life. The great spaces enfolded them, wrapped them in silence as in a vast robe. But the old, sweet song was in their hearts as they rode slowly forward — to the Light!

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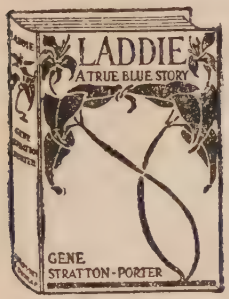

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